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LOST FOR GOLD.

VOL. I.



LOST FOR GOLD.

BY

KATHARINE KING,

AUTHOR OF

“THE QUEEN OF THE REGIMENT.”

“There is thy gold—worse poison to men’s minds,
Doing more murders in this loathsome world
Than these poor compounds that thou mayst not sell.
I sell thee poison—thou hast sold me none.”

Romeo and Juliet.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.




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LOST FOR GOLD.

CHAPTER I.

IT was a bright, sunny forenoon in the month of July, and the little town of Sloane, in the west of Ireland, was looking its best in the brilliant Summer sunlight, as a tall gentlemanly boy, between fourteen and fifteen years of age, passed slowly up one of the principal streets; lingering awhile on the bridge, leaning over the parapet, and gazing into the brown rippling water, as if he had already acquired some experience in the so-called gentle art of angling, and would have liked to try his luck in that inviting and far-renowned pool. But it was evident he might wish in vain, and he knew it, as one could judge from the expression of his face, while he watched a lady, clad in the most work-

man-like attire possible, taking a preliminary cast, as she stood on a kind of pier built into the middle of the stream, for the express convenience of those who came to fish in the brown waters of the Garva.


"There she is at it again," he muttered; "don't I wish I had licence to fish there? I wonder will she catch the salmon I saw yesterday? Such a whopper! Ah, there's a bite!"

The bite, however, led to no result, and after waiting a few minutes, the lad pursued his way up the street. A little further on, as he neared the corner leading into Castle Street, he was accosted by a tall, handsome, middle-aged, and gentlemanly-looking man.

"Well, Herbert," he said, "so lessons are over for the day, I suppose. What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know, father," answered the boy addressed as Herbert. "I think I was going to see if Minna would come out for a walk."

"Never mind Minna just at present," replied his father; "come with me—I have some news for you. The Macmasters are giving a picnic up the lake to-morrow, and Minna and you are asked to go with me."



"I don't want to go to the Macmaster's picnic," answered Herbert, stiffly; "and what's more, I won't go."

"Nonsense, boy, you'll do as I tell you. Why do you dislike them?"

"They're rude people," the lad replied. "A day or two ago I was in Peterson's shop with mother, when Mrs. Macmaster came in, and the minute she saw mother she gathered her dress up, as if she feared it would, by touching her, get soiled, and hurried out of the shop, calling to me, 'Herbert, come out here, I want to speak to you.'"

"What did you do?" asked his father, while a dull, red flush crept over his face as he watched stealthily the indignant look on the boy's open, uplifted brow.


"I took no notice of her, and pretended not to hear her, till mother, who had turned very white and trembled, when she perceived Mrs. Macmaster's conduct, told me to go out and see what she wanted. Then I went very slowly, but by that time she had got tired of waiting, and was going up the street. I didn't trouble to go after her, however."

They walked on side by side for a few min-

utes in silence, as the boy ceased speaking ; and then an observer would have had time to note how curiously alike they were, and yet how unlike. They were both handsome, with similar long violet eyes, black lashes, waving light brown hair,—on the boy's head dashed with broad golden lights,—clear, pale skin, and oval form of face ; but the countenance of the man indicated a weak, irresolute, though loving nature, while in every feature of the boy's expressive face could be traced resolution—a character strong and determined in every way, but whether its strength would be devoted to good or evil, the warping influences of life were yet to determine.

As he walked on now by his father's side, one could tell some resolve was forming in his mind, from the set expression of his mouth, and the steady glance of his eyes as he raised them at length to his father's and spoke.

“Father, what's the meaning of the way the people here go on about my mother ? They ask you and Minna and me about everywhere—at least, they don't ask me always, because I'm too young yet ; but Minna and you go everywhere, and they never ask my mother,



nor call on her, nor bow or speak to her in the streets, but run away from her as if she would hurt them. I've noticed it for a long time, and I hate them for it. I'll be revenged on them all some day, if I live; and now I want to hear the reason, and you may as well tell me, for I *will* know it."

"Hush, child," answered his father, with an attempt at sternness that contrasted strangely with the pained, nervous expression of his face.

"You don't understand these things—you can't—you're not old enough; and you must not quarrel with our neighbours on your mother's account; no doubt they have their reasons for their conduct, and she would tell you herself that it would do neither her nor you good if you tried to fight her battles."

"Then you won't tell me?" asked the boy, taking no heed of the latter part of his father's speech.

"No, Herbert; I said I wouldn't, and it will be no use your asking me any more; so drop the subject."

"Very well," replied the boy, an expression of dogged determination clouding his bright, childlike eyes as he spoke. "I shall find out

from some one else; there will be plenty who will tell me, I am sure. And I'll not go to the Macmasters until I know."

"You shall go to the Macmasters," answered his father, rather angrily. "I choose you should, and I desire you to think no more about such foolish questions as you have just been putting to me. No doubt, if you ask others, you will find plenty of people who will tell you wicked stories, that will make you miserable: but it will be what you deserve, if you pry into matters that children like you cannot possibly understand. You may go home now."

Looking very much as if he would have liked to prolong the discussion, Herbert Mounteagle turned away, and retraced his steps till he came to a nice-looking house situated in a quiet and rather dull street.


"Where's Miss Minna?" he asked the neat maid who let him in.

"She's in the garden, sir," answered the girl.

"And mother, where's she?"

"Out, sir, with the little ones."

"Very well," he said, "tell her I'm in the garden if she asks for me when she comes in."



And so saying, he opened the dining-room door, and passed out through its long French window into the pretty shady garden beyond.

At some distance from the house, seated in the shade of a far spreading sycamore tree, was a young girl. Her attitude, as she lay on the grass, with her arms thrown back, and her head resting upon them, was a picture of laziness and grace. Her dress was of plain brown holland, tastefully but simply made; and though there was an air of wildness pervading her whole appearance, still she looked a lady.

As the boy approached her unheard, he stopped a minute or two, and gazed at her with the same stubborn look in his deep blue eyes that had distinguished him in speaking to his father. She was beautiful certainly, and though that thought was far enough from her brother's mind as he watched her lazy graceful repose, yet he felt a natural disinclination to disturb so charming a picture. Her hair, of an intense blue blackness, hung in heavy curls about her neck and shoulders, setting off the clear pale white of her complexion. She was singularly and dazzlingly fair, in spite of her black hair; and there was hardly enough colouring in her cheeks to re-

deem her from a slight ghostliness of aspect, as she lay thus with her eyes closed, and her long black lashes contrasting with her paleness. A faint smile curved her lips, after Herbert had stood thus watching her a minute. It was a beautiful mouth, with a similar expression of loving weakness to that which characterised her father's; a moment more and the smile expanded into a merry laugh, as she sat up, opening a pair of glorious eyes, that after all constituted the principal beauty in her beautiful face. Loving, lovable, and weak, her mouth had declared her character to be; her eyes repeated this estimate, adding to it an intimation that in her power of loving there might be a passionate force which could develop strength of a higher, more perfect kind than could be found in her brother's resolute and matter-of-fact character.

"Why, Herbert, where have you been?" she cried; "you said you were coming to take me for a walk, and I have been waiting ever so long. Besides, I wanted to tell you we are going to a pic-nic to-morrow, given by the Macmasters. Won't it be fun?"

"You'll like it, Minna," answered Herbert sitting down, and continuing rather crossly. "I

do believe you girls like anything that will give you an opportunity of dressing and flirting; and you never think, never! I wonder you don't reflect, Minna, on all you see going on round us; but I suppose it's because you are a girl, and I sometimes think girls have no souls, or if they have, they turn them to precious little account. Here am I, two years and more younger than you, and I see and feel things in our daily life that I don't believe you ever notice. Why's that?"

He stopped and looked gloomily at her, whilst she confronted him with eyes gleaming like stars, as she listened in childlike astonishment.


"What's the matter with you, Bertie? Have I done anything wrong? Of course I like going to the pic-nic, though I don't think you have any right to accuse me of flirting; I am too young for that. Why, I'm very little more than sixteen. Who ever heard of a girl of that age flirting!" and she laughed merrily at the posterous idea.

"You do though, with that Captain Langham. You and he think I am too much of a child to be up to your game; but you know I have gone about a good deal, and I know that sort of thing

pretty well when I see it. However, that's not what I came to talk about—I want to know what is the reason mother is never asked anywhere, as we are; and no one calls on her, or speaks to her. What is the meaning of it? Do you know?—if you do, you had better tell me, for find it out I will.”

The girl's bright face clouded over, and she shook her head sadly.

“I remarked it long ago,” she answered, “and I asked mamma one day why it was. At first she told me not to think about it, or ask questions; but when she found it was always on my mind—for I used often to sit all day wondering what could be meant—she told me she had done something wrong long ago, and that people knew of it, and had never forgiven her. She cried so when she spoke of it, and seemed so unhappy, I was very sorry I ever asked her. She said she wouldn't mind it, but for our sakes, as she feared it would do us harm in life; but I told her to make her mind easy about that, as we were not afraid of the world, and indeed people are always kind to us. After all, when I came to think of it, I was sure mamma was mistaken, for I cannot imagine her ever hav-



ing done anything to make people treat her as they do ; and so I told her, but she only wept more the more I tried to comfort her ; and now I never speak of it, and only pretend not to notice. After all, she has got papa ; I know if I had a husband like him, I should not mind the whole of the rest of the world, if they were ever so unkind."

"That's because you know nothing about it," answered Herbert rudely. "There's more in life than a husband or a wife. There's honour and ambition, and name and fame ; I'd rather have the praise of my friends, and the respect and fear of my enemies, than any amount of love, and that bosh. But that's all you girls think about. I don't believe one word about that story of my mother's having done anything wrong ; it's not like her ; I think it is some one else who has done wrong, and left the blame on her, and she is too good to put it on the real evil-doer. I shall find out—remember that, Minna, I am going to find out all about this business, and set it to rights. Though she may be too good to blame the person who has wronged her, her son should have no such scruples, and you may be sure he will have none. And


won't father be glad when it is all cleared up! I know he feels it, for I saw him get red all over to-day when I told him how Mrs. Macmaster treated us the other day."

"But you are so young, Herbert," said the girl, looking at him doubtfully; "how will you accomplish so much?"

"I am young," answered the boy, proudly; "but my heart's in this, and unless I can change our way of living, I shall do something desperate. I hate all those good respectable people who turn up their noses at our mother for some fault that I know she can never have committed. I should like to make everything straight, and then I would turn on them, and trample them down below us, if I could. That would be a day worth living for."

An evil look turned his noble, handsome face into a painful sight, as he spoke. Minna saw it, and said, with a frightened voice:

"Oh, Herbert, don't say that—it's wrong, and it's not like you. Find out the truth if you will, right our mother if you can, but, then, remember you will conquer your enemies better, win more respect and more esteem, by kindness and love than you can ever command from people by force."



"Strength is grand, power and force are god-like," answered the boy. "That's what I like about those old Greek fellows; might was right in those days, and should be so still if I had my way; and power I will have some day, for this I know and feel, though I can't yet work it out or explain it. Determination will carry you safe to the end in view, if you make up your mind to force your way through or over every obstacle."

"But it might not be right, Herbert dear, to do as you say. Suppose the obstacle in your way was one you could not get over without doing wrong—how then?"

"I wish you wouldn't ask such stupid questions," replied the boy, rather crossly. "Of course it would be right—why shouldn't it? But that's just like you girls, you always catch hold of the wrong side of the question. Hullo! here's mother!"

Springing to his feet as he spoke, Herbert hurried to meet her.

"Where have you been, mother?" he asked; "you look tired. Sit down here in the shade and rest."

With a care and tenderness remarkable in so

young a boy, he made her sit down in a cool, shady spot, took the parcel she was carrying out of her hand, and threw himself down beside her.


"I met your father just as I was coming in," she said, after a minute's pause. "He tells me you are going to the Macmasters' pic-nic to-morrow. I am sure you will have a pleasant day."

"I don't want to go; I don't like them," answered Herbert, whose face, a moment before so bright, clouded over at the mention of their name.

"Your father wishes you to go, dear," said Mrs. Mounteagle; "and therefore you must go; but I thought you would have liked it also. What do you say, Minna?"

"Oh! I like it above all things!" cried the girl, raising her brilliant eyes to her mother's face. "I do so love gaiety and society, and pretty dresses, and dancing, and fun of all kinds, in short. What fun life is, to be sure!—at least, before one gets married and grows old," she added, as a corrective.

"Well, you are a goose," interrupted her brother contemptuously; "as if one brought on



the other. You can't call mother old, at any rate, though she is married."

The girl glanced at her mother's tall, upright figure, and handsome refined face, as she answered:

"Well, I didn't mean exactly to say marriage would make a person grow old all at once, but it makes them not care for fun, and, in fact, become old fogies. Not that mother is an old fogy, but then there may be a few exceptions even to that rule. Mother, you look ill; what's the matter?"

"I am tired from the heat of the sun, dears; I'll go in and lie down," replied Mrs. Mount-eagle rising. "No, don't follow me," she added, for Herbert rose as if to accompany her. "I can go in myself, and I wish to be alone."


"Now that's all your doing," said Herbert, as his mother disappeared from sight. "How could you talk such foolish nonsense about marrying? You know it is a girl's business to marry, and of course mother does not like to hear you speak in that foolish way against it. I know mother would be glad if you were to do so, for I heard her say the other day to father that beauty was a

great temptation, and she could not feel easy till she saw you safely married."

"I daresay you didn't hear what she said right, and only fancied that; I'm going to look out my dress for to-morrow, so good-bye for the present," answered Minna, getting up slowly and walking towards the house, singing as she went. "And I will marry my own love," a selection which she evidently considered appropriate to their conversation.

Next day rose bright and clear; not too bright, as weatherwise Minna observed, when she rose at four o'clock and took a peep out of her window; but a calm clear grey morning, that brightened as the hours crept by, and finally burst forth, radiant and beautiful, over mountain and upland, lake and stream.

"How delicious it will be on the water to-day!" she mused, as she tied back her clustering curls with blue ribbon, and surveyed her own image in the glass with evident approval. "Captain Langham says I look best in blue, but I don't think so myself, and I do believe he says much more than he really means. He's very nice, and I might care for him a good deal more than I do—at least, she corrected herself, if I could feel quite



sure of him ; I am half afraid sometimes he only amuses himself with me, and laughs at me behind my back. Ah ! if I knew that were the case, I would show him I have something in me not to be laughed at. I suppose," she continued, looking steadily at herself in the glass, "all that women ever have achieved by the power of beauty, it is in my power to achieve ; yet I could give up that if he cared for me as I think he does." " Well," she added aloud with a sigh, " we shall see ; and at any rate this is a fine day, and I mean to enjoy myself."

And very happy and lovely she did look, when the company all assembled by the river side, previous to embarking in the boats provided to take them up the lake. The pic-nic was to be on an island, about four miles up, and the company occupied four boats. The party consisted of about thirty people, among whom was the Captain Langham before alluded to by Minna and her brother. He was not long in attaching himself to their party. He entered the boat with them, and devoted himself to the beautiful girl in a manner that caused a pleased look to pass over Mr. Mounteagle's face when he noticed it, and made Minna's heart flutter, a feeling

for which the poor girl, in her innocence, was at a loss to account.

As to Herbert, he watched their animated conversation gloomily for awhile, then fell into chat with one of the boatmen, on the all-absorbing topic of fishing ; and on this congenial theme forgot for awhile the cares and vexations that had occupied his mind at starting.

The island was reached, the dinner-tablespread, the good things provided eaten, and yet somehow Minna Mounteagle did not feel as happy as she had intended, and as the boating part of the excursion had led her to anticipate. To say that she was unhappy, in a manner she herself did not in the least understand, would be no more than the truth ; and the reason of the curious sensation of uneasiness and disquietude that oppressed her was that right opposite to her sat Captain Langham, his whole attention taken up by, and centred in, Miss Peyton, a young lady Minna had often met before, but whom she had never particularly noticed, until her bold and undisguised flirtation now attracted attention.

She was a very small woman, with a fair babyish face, considered pretty by many people,

though Minna would not have allowed her the smallest claim to good looks, had she been asked to decide such a question at that minute. She watched her without seeming to watch; she was far too proud to let Captain Langham know she had noticed his defection, and so, during dinner, kept up an animated and tolerably successful conversation with her neighbour. When the ladies rose, however, she beckoned Herbert to her, and said :

“ Bertie, dear, come with me for a scramble. I am tired of all the talk and noise; let's go to the top of the hill there, where we can lie down in the shade, and look at the view.”

“ With all my heart,” answered Herbert; “ I am glad you have some sense. I was afraid you would be wanting to keep with these people all day, and I wished to tell you a plan I had formed for finding out what I was talking to you about yesterday.”

They went up to the summit of a hill near by, from which they could command a beautiful view of the lake. At first they talked, but presently the heat of the day exerted its influence over them, and they both lay back among the feathery ferns and long waving grass, motion-

less and silent. Thoughts, strange and bitter for such mere children, were passing through the minds of both, and neither felt inclined to speak or move, when the sound of voices fell upon their ears. The speakers were ascending the hill, and in a few minutes it was evident they had sat down, not far from the spot where the boy and girl lay hidden. These two lay there still, with closed eyes—half slumbering, half thinking; the newcomers were not near enough to see them, and as the conversation was not likely to interest or disturb them, they lay quiet, and presently almost forgot there were strangers near them.

Suddenly a few words rang out clear and distinct on the sultry air. They were not spoken in a louder tone than the words immediately preceding them, but they were spoken with more interest and emphasis.

“I say, Langham, who was that very lovely girl sitting by you in the boat this morning? I don’t know when I have seen a more perfect face.”

“Ah!” answered Captain Langham, in a sleepy tone, every word of which, slowly drawn out, was distinctly heard. “You mean Mount-

eagle's daughter. Yes, she is pretty, and a nice little thing too."

"So you seemed to think, from what I saw; do you intend to marry her?"

"Why, my good fellow," came the answer, in a louder and more startled tone, "don't you know the story of that family? Mounteagle never married their mother; don't you see she's not here to-day—she's never asked anywhere. Those poor children are illegitimate, and beautiful though the girl undoubtedly is, nobody will marry her. Lucky for her if she escapes the same fate as her mother."

As these words fell one by one on the eagerly listening ears of Minna and Herbert Mounteagle, a terrible change crept over the expression of each youthful and, till now, untroubled face.

A look of despair and horror it was on the pallid countenance of the girl; of indignant, passionate anger and burning shame on that of the boy.

"Come away, Minna," he gasped hoarsely, as Captain Langham ceased speaking; "we have no business here, nor with these fine people at all, if this be true;" and dragging her after

him by the hand, he burst through the bushes and hurried down the slope.

Captain Langham's companion, a stranger in the place, Mr. Longfield by name, was about to speak, but hearing the snapping boughs and rustling of the grass, turned, and caught a glimpse of the boy and girl as they hurried away.

"By Jove!" he said. "I am afraid our careless talk has done mischief; those young Mount-eagles were near us, and heard every word we said; and there's a bad look in the boy's face, that shows he won't forget and forgive in a hurry."

"You don't say they heard us?" asked Captain Langham anxiously. "Well, I'm sorry; it must be an awful blow to them, if they understand it, and I suppose she at least does. How could we have been so stupid? But here comes the boy back again; what's up now, I wonder?"

And, in truth, Herbert was coming back again, with a white, set face, and the clear, childlike eyes of yesterday grown bold and hard as he stopped before Captain Langham, and said:

"Tell me all about what you were talking of just now; I choose to know, and after what I

heard, you have no right to withhold anything from me."

"My poor boy," answered the captain, in a manner meant to be kind, but which, from its pitying tone, was only intensely aggravating, "you are too young to understand anything of what we were saying, and I should not be justified in telling you more than you may have picked up through our foolish inadvertence."


"But I say I will know!" cried the boy passionately; "nothing you can say can make the fact worse to us than it already is, and if you do not prove to me that you had truth with you in saying what you did, I will tell my father. Then, be it true or false, of this I am sure, you will have to answer to him for the words you have this day spoken, in the only way in which such words can be vindicated."

"You are right, no doubt, boy, in your estimate of the satisfaction your father will desire; but you forget that our service does not permit of duelling, and public opinion at the present day will hardly uphold even a hot-headed Irishman in such a course. Even the certainty of such a result cannot make me finish intentionally a mischief accidentally begun."

"You cannot make matters worse, you may make them better," answered the boy steadily. "Oh! sir," he continued, turning to Mr. Longfield, "help me to persuade him; for I must know the meaning of all this, and I will; I have determined to find out all, and so why make it worse, as it will be, if my father hears of it?"

"I think the boy is right," replied Mr. Longfield slowly; "a duel would spread the scandal far and wide, yet that would be the probable result of this conversation reaching Mr. Mount-eagle's ears; you could hardly refuse him that satisfaction, in spite of the probable consequences to yourself, when you know there would be no other means of resenting the offence left open to him. Besides, they have heard the worst already; it is cruelty to refuse to let them know all, if there is anything more to tell or explain, which I confess I don't see. What is it you want to know, my boy? Sit down here, and Captain Langham will tell you."

"I won't sit down," answered Herbert Mount-eagle doggedly; and he went on, turning to Captain Langham: "you said just now my mother was not married. Is that true?—and when and how did you hear of it?"



"It is true, I grieve to say; how I heard it first I don't know; everyone is aware of it, and talks of it, but I am indeed sorry that through me it has come to your ears. I would have given much to have spared you this, it cannot now be helped, you must learn to bear it, and make the best of it——"

"That's enough," interrupted the lad rather rudely, "I can't listen to such stuff now. Tell me," he continued with visible hesitation, "what does the world say? Who—who is to blame?"

"My poor child," answered the man gravely, "that is a question you had better not ask! It will not make things better to believe one of your parents has injured the other; believe that in this, as in most cases of wrong-doing, there is blame on both sides."

For a moment Herbert stood before them silent; then he raised his head and said:

"You are right, I should not have asked a stranger that, but I will find it out," and turning as he spoke, he walked rapidly away.

"A strange lad," said Longfield, after a few minutes' silence, "and one on whose character this day's work will leave a stamp that will

never be effaced. I hope he may not go to the bad, but I fear it; there is power in his face, and pride—too much pride for one situated as he.”


“I pity the girl most,” answered Langham. “He can live over it, work it down, and, if he has in him the power and pride you think, he may make himself a new, an honourable name in another country; but with her it is different, she must know and accept the fact that, with all her beauty and all her fascination, men will only seek her society as an amusement or a pastime, never with honest love, the story of her birth standing between her and those who might otherwise ask her in marriage.”

“Do you really think it is as you say?” asked his friend.

“I know it; had I not been aware of her story I would have proposed to her myself before now; but I could not bring home to my friends a nameless bride. I have not position enough to brave out the world’s censure; and had I the position to do it, I doubt if I would have the will. Come, we must be going.”

Slowly and silently they descended the hill, and found the company just preparing to enter

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the boats. Pale and sad, with weebegone eyes, Minna Munteagle stood by her brother, waiting for her turn to embark. With even more alacrity than he had shown in the morning, Captain Langham stepped forward to assist her as she moved on in her turn, for he had a kind though selfish heart, and he was moved by the pitiful change the day had wrought in her aspect.

But she bowed to him with a cold dignified grace, as she muttered in a voice inaudible to all but him :

“Thank you, but I can do without your assistance ; such as I must learn to be independent.”

He drew back as though he had received a blow ; there was a world of quiet scorn under the studied humility of the reply—it opened his eyes to the light in which that girl must regard him ; how she could not but compare the attentions he had paid her, the words he had whispered to her, with the opinions he had avowed and she had overheard on the hillside. No wonder there was contempt in her voice and look, and overruling the pain in her haggard eyes ; yet he could not but feel, as she stood there before

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him, with the stain on her birth, and no claim to the name she bore, that she was worthier respect, and esteem, and love than many a high-born dame noble in birth and lineage, and at whom the finger of scorn had never been pointed.


If any could have looked into that young girl's mind, as she sat motionless and silent in the stern of the boat on the return journey, they would have pitied her. It was not that she was overwhelmed by the shame of the cruel knowledge that had just burst on her ; it was not that she realised the fact that she occupied her place in the present gay and well-born company on sufferance. At another time, later on, perhaps, she would recognise this, and feel the sting—now her mind was wholly taken up with a more private and acute misery than this.

She had doubted in the morning whether Captain Langham loved her—had determined not to allow herself to care for him, till she was satisfied on this point : now the conviction burst on her, painning her as she had not dreamt such a thought could ever pain, that she did love him. Her love given before it was asked ; there was a humiliation, a bitterness in the idea to

her young, proud spirit that overcame for a time all other considerations. And yet she had not been to blame, she urged to herself, as she went over all their intercourse again and again. She had certainly believed he cared for her—there had been a look in his eyes, a tone in his voice, when he addressed her, that surely was not meant for the rest of the world as well. But then, his words and tone as he spoke to his companion on the hill! Why, even had he not stated his opinion on the subject so plainly, the mere fact of his talking of their sad position to another, and that other a stranger, showed how little his heart had really been interested in her. “What a fool I have been, to be so deceived!” she thought. “I believed him truer and nobler than anyone else; and, after all, I find him to have been only a better actor. Ah, me! I must act too now; it is the only resource people in our position have; we must not let the world see how this discovery galls, for some would pity us, and their pity would be as painful as the ridicule of others. He shall see I can play my part too, and he shall not know it is acting. If I could but take him in his own net I should be revenged. Let me think—have I courage and

skill and strength to plot, and plan, and work for that? Can I keep my heart cool and my brain keen and active? Ah! how changed I am since the morning!—then I should have thought a girl wicked who could scheme thus for revenge—now it seems to me fair and natural. I will try, and if I succeed—she roused herself from her thoughts by an effort; in her present state of mind, what she would do, if she succeeded in her plan, would not bear looking into. Ah! how miserable she felt; and it seemed to her, when she glanced furtively in his direction, that Captain Langham was unhappy also. Stealthy and swift as her glance was, his eyes met it, for he was watching her with a strange intentness. She was furious with herself for looking at him, and yet she was glad she had done so; she had seen on his face an expression of sorrow and commiseration very strange there, and she knew it was her misery that called it up.

She could not understand him, could not reconcile his feeling for her with the words she had heard on the hill; she was puzzled, baffled, indignant, and yet softened. They were nearing the river side; they would soon leave the boat



and begin to walk homeward. What a walk it would be! Minna's eyes sought her father's face—it was gay and untroubled, as it almost always was; he was talking to a lady of the party, and their conversation seemed amusing, for they laughed loudly. A kind of angry, passionate protest against this gaiety rose up in Minna's heart; if all that she had heard were true, how could her father go about laughing and happy? Whose fault was it, this cruel wrong that blighted thus two lives, as yet scarcely begun? Her mother sorrowed and mourned continually, she knew; the sadness that had puzzled her so often, puzzled her no longer now—in her indignant, selfish, youthful sorrow, she felt even that it was right and fitting that it did not, great though it was, atone for the mischief done. She, then, who grieved thus, who felt the evil so keenly, must be the one most to blame; how else could she account for her father's light-heartedness?

She was too young, too innocent of evil doing to understand it in any way clearly, but it seemed to her right and natural that the wrong-doer should suffer, and, therefore, her mother was that wrongdoer. Then she remem-

bered her mother's quiet resolution, her gentle firmness and good sense ; while, in contradistinction to these, her father's irresolute, tenderhearted, wavering nature, so completely subordinate to her mother's influence, seemed to establish the view she had taken more and more, the longer she thought of it.

The blow had been cruel, and as they floated down the river in the soft Summer twilight, she fancied every whisper, every glance in her direction had a mocking meaning, and her heart hardened. She looked at her brother, her partner in the pain and humiliation of this discovery. They two would have to be all in all to each other now, for she turned angrily from the contemplation of her mother's life of patient suffering and expiation ; and on her father, though she regarded him as less to blame, she looked with distrust.

Yes, her brother must be all to her now, and she to him ; for it never seemed to her possible that he could have arrived at any other conclusion than the one reached by herself. He sat near one of the boatmen, but his anxiety about his favourite sport was forgotten ; his head dropped forward in a despondent attitude,


the light was gone out of his eyes, and a strange, hard, unchildlike look was on his young face. His mind was busy with many bitter thoughts, which his youth and inexperience rendered him incapable of mastering, but from which his crude positive instinct sometimes struck out a spark of real truth. Bewilderment, shame, and bitter anger seethed and fermented in his brain, till he could hardly realise what had occurred, or what the discovery was that had so changed the course of his life. Foolish nonsensical nothings, the careless words of some one sitting near him, the measured splash of the oars, had all power to distract his attention, and draw him off from the consideration that he wished to give to the unexpectedly answered question that had so long been puzzling him.

Then he roused himself from the shifty and purposeless frame of mind settling upon him, and repeating to himself the words he had heard, set himself to consider them, with the intent to find where the blame lay. It was a curious fact that the mind of this boy, scarcely more than a mere child, was not able to accept the dreadful fact he had that day heard in its en-

tirety, without questioning and seeking to discover on whom the wrong should be visited. He could not blindly submit to think both had been in the wrong—that both were at fault, as Captain Langham had suggested; and yet the same reflections that had led Minna to condemn her mother, had a precisely opposite effect on his judgment.

The reason for this inquiring and, in a child, unusual frame of mind, was most probably his intense love for his mother. His father was no doubt everything that was kind and indulgent, but already the sterner stuff of which the boy was made had discerned and condemned the weakness of his father's character.

But the mother—ah! that was different! Though so gentle, he well knew that when she had once decided on a course of action, the thing was as good as done; that her character was loyal and true; that she had suffered much on this very account, and he could not, and would not, believe the fault was hers. Before he knew the stigma under which she rested, he had declared vehemently it was for the wrong done by another that she bore the aversion and neglect of all around; and now it seemed clear



to him that other was his father. Then his father's weakness and subordination to his mother's influence, which had made it so plain to Minna that their mother suffered for her own sin, did not screen his father to the boy's eyes. He knew, and had felt more than once, how stubborn a weak mind can be ; occasionally he had seen the stronger mind yield to its influence, and, child though he was, guessed that in this case it had been so too. An older person would have told him that a woman's strength is often her weakness ; but of this he knew nothing, and was only guided to his conclusion by the kind of instinct peculiar to children, which made him also recognize the fact that those who do wrong do not always mourn over it afterwards, as his mother mourned.

And now, as he arrived at this decision, another question presented itself : where was the revenge he had planned against the destroyer of his mother's happiness ? How could he work to secure revenge upon the father who, whatever might be his sins, had always been kind and loving to him ? And supposing he could still cherish such a plan till years and opportunity helped him, and the vengeance was consum-

mated, how would all this affect his mother? Where in the whole world could there be found a remedy for her blighted name and withered life? where could shelter and protection be granted? His youthful vehement heart, blinded as it was by passionate resentment, could not but answer—only in the love of the man who had been to her as a husband could such a remedy be found; only in his arms would such shelter and protection be granted.

The lad sighed, and looked gloomily around him as he realised this truth; they were nearing the shore, and in the dim Summer twilight, the tall trees by the water's edge looked black and spectral, while a low moaning breeze, the precursor of coming rain, swept through them. Only a few hours ago and they had all waved brightly in the sunlight, now they were changed and darkened like his life; but they would be as bright as ever to-morrow, and the rain, if it fell, would but adorn them with a fresher, greener tinge; whilst for him he felt, with the sullen apathy of despair, the brightness of life was over.

The boat touched the land, and it was characteristic of the boy and his sorrow that he never,

in all his musings, reverted to his sister as she had to him ; and now he did not look round for her, but, jumping ashore, hurried off homewards. Their father was occupied in attending to the wants of Mrs. Macmaster ; Minna therefore waited quietly till everyone had left the boat, when she rose and prepared to step ashore, trusting that the obscurity would allow of her making her escape unperceived.

As she balanced for a moment on the gunwale of the boat, about to spring to land, a figure hurried down the beach towards her ; in the darkness she recognized Captain Langham's form and footstep, made a spring, that she might avoid accepting his assistance, fell short of her jump, and would have slipped into the river, had he not caught her as he stood on the brink, and helped her up the bank.

" Why did you not wait for me to assist you ? " he asked, gently and reprovingly, in the tone that she used to fancy, and hated herself for having so fancied, was loving.

She was silent for a minute ; it was still sweet to hear him speak to her in that tone, and yet she called herself a fool for thinking so, as she listened. Then her indignation at his still

carrying on what she knew from his own lips to be a deception, got the better of her, and she said passionately :

“I heard what you said on the hill to-day. Do you still ask me why I would not wait for your help?”

“No,” he said, half puzzled, for he was far from understanding all the meaning of her answer, or comprehending all that was passing in her mind ; “but I cannot see how that can make such a difference between us ; we were friends before, when I knew all your trouble, though you did not ; can we not, then, be friends still ?”

He paused and looked at her earnestly, but the deepening twilight prevented the expression of her face being seen. Had he seen it then, he might have understood the danger and the value of the friendship he was offering, and been warned in time ; but he saw nothing, and waited for an answer anxiously.

“Friends,” she repeated at length ; “yes, I suppose we may be so, if there is such a thing as friendship for me in this world. You knew me in my happy past, you will know me in my blighted future ; if you care that it should be so, we will be friends.”

"I do care," he answered; "can you doubt it, or do you think your friendship will be less dear to me because I have unwittingly caused you suffering, and have seen you changed in one hour, by my thoughtless words, from an ignorant, mirthful child into a sorrowing woman, bowed down by the faults and evil-doings of others, not by evil-doing or failings of her own? If we are friends," he added, standing before her and holding out his hand as he spoke, "let us shake hands on the bargain, that it may be neither broken nor forgotten."

She put out her hand mechanically; her mind was wandering away again from the spot where they stood by the river side to the house where the mother she condemned was waiting and watching for them; but as his fingers closed on hers she started, and awoke to a full sense and realisation of the present moment.

"Friends ever and always," he repeated, looking into her eyes by the dim starlight; and she, with a kind of comfort at her heart, in spite of what she had heard and knew, looked up in his face, and answered simply and quietly,

"Yes."

He held her hand still for a minute; then slowly and gently let it fall, saying,

“Come, we must get on after the others; your father is going up to see Mrs. Macmaster home, —we will follow him there.”


Then, after they had walked a few steps in silence, he went on :

“If you ever want anything I can do for you, apply to me without fear; if you need a friend to confide in, confide in me; your brother is young, treat me as though I were your elder brother, and I will not fail you; promise me you will do this.”

“I cannot,” she answered; “it might give you trouble or annoyance were I to act as you desire.”

“Are we not friends?” he replied; “you gave me your hand on it just now, and yet I shall think but little of your friendship if you still refuse to make use of me, and treat me as one. Won’t you promise?”

“Very well, I promise; but do not ever expect me to call for your assistance; we lead a quiet life, and I cannot imagine any circumstances which would authorise me to trouble you.”



“Never mind them, I hope they may never arise,” he interrupted ; “but if they do, keep your word.”

As he spoke they arrived at Mrs. Macmaster’s house ; and there, after handing her over to her father’s charge, Captain Langham disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Herbert Mounteagle left the boat and set out on his way home, without for one moment stopping to assist or take care of his sister, he had in no way made up his mind what course of action he would pursue on his arrival at home. Should he take his mother into his confidence, let her know by his conduct that he had discovered her misfortune, and show that he still loved her, and exonerated her from blame, as connected with the evils that had overtaken them ; or should he keep the matter to himself, only talking it over with his sister, and warning her also never to betray their knowledge ? This course seemed to him, at least for the present, to be the best ; he knew well how his mother would dread their knowing her secret, the more because she would then feel that her children must be enabled to see the

share their father had in the wrong-doing and, indeed, in Herbert's eyes he was the person who had been the cause of all this misery. The mother would wish to defend him, the boy knew; and he knew also that he himself, sore from the feeling of wrong and degradation, would, if he spoke, utter hard words on the subject, which would wound the mother he loved.

Thus when Minna and her father entered, they found Herbert seated at the table, his head resting on his hands, and his face hidden from view. Her mother was seated near the lamp working, but looked up with her soft sweet smile as they entered.

"You have had a long day," she said cheerfully; "Herbert has come in with a bad headache! I wanted him to go to bed, but he would not until you returned. And you too, Minna, look worn out; I am afraid the day was too much for you both."


"I am quite well," answered Minna, in a short, sharp tone. Herbert looked up quickly; he did not understand, nor had he anticipated, the view Minna would take of the discovery they had that day made, and was pained and startled at the tone in which she spoke. Minna noticed

his look, but misunderstood its meaning. She stood a moment musing, then said, "I am tired indeed; I had better go off at once. Good night," and without attempting to give any of them the customary evening kiss, she left the room. In a minute or two more Herbert followed his sister's example, leaving his father and mother alone.

"What can have happened to the two children?" asked Mr. Mounteagle, when they were gone; "they seem both dreadfully put out."

"I do not know," answered Mrs. Mounteagle, for so she was always called. "I noticed Herbert was not himself the minute he returned, but he said he had a headache, and I thought no more about it till Minna came in, looking if possible worse. Oh! Richard, I tremble every time they go out, for fear those poor things should learn their true history; but I will say no more about it—we have chosen our path in life, we have lived in it well content hitherto, and it is only now, when our children are growing up, and I see how blighted their lives must be by our sin, that I begin to feel what the misery, the curse of evil-doing can be."

He did not answer when she ceased speaking,



and indeed she did not seem to expect an answer, for she never raised her eyes to his face, but folded her work, with patient, trembling fingers; and when it was all deposited in her work-basket, she took that up, and quietly left the room.

After school-hours next day, Herbert came, as usual, to look for his mother and Minna in the garden. Minna was there, but not his mother. "Where is she?" he asked, as soon as he came near his sister; and there was something eager and excited in his look, that made the girl understand he had news to tell her.

"She is in her room, if you mean mother," answered Minna, with a gloomy look and tone that were not lost upon her brother.

"What have you been doing?" he asked sternly, "I do believe you have been making mischief."

"I have not," she answered angrily, "but I could bear this concealment no longer; I told mother what I had heard yesterday, asked her if it was true, and demanded, as my right, to know by whose fault it was we were placed in such an intolerable position."

"And what did she say?" asked the boy,

"what answer did she make, when you had the cruelty to put such questions to her?"

"She said all we had heard was true, and that she alone was to blame for the suffering entailed upon us. She said, if she had been true to herself, to her sex, to our father even, this misery might all have been spared; it was her impetuous, uncontrollable, self-willed disposition that had been the cause of this wretchedness. I knew," continued the girl excitedly, "that she must have been in the wrong, and she acknowledged everything that I thought, and more—she said, and I know her words by heart, though I cannot quite understand them, that no woman was ever lost who had not first betrayed herself. I came out here then and left her, for I could not bear to see her sorrow, even though I cannot forgive her. I might have been so happy but for her!"

"And you thought only of your own lost happiness—you who will have plenty of opportunities of being happy through life again; while she will not often even think herself so. Of course she took the blame on herself; would it have been like her to do anything else? But is it for all that one whit more true? I have



heard the real story to-day, and you shall hear it too. I do not know whether you will then alter your opinion, but I know it strengthens me in mine. I heard this from our master ; he saw me looking ill, and at lessons I was pre-occupied and could not repeat them correctly, so he took me into his room and asked me what was the matter. At first I would not tell him ; then I thought this was just the opportunity I desired to learn all. I repeated to him what we overheard yesterday, and begged him to tell me what he knew.

“ His story was simply this : Twenty years ago, when our father was about five and twenty years of age, he was quartered in a country town in the west of England. Our mother lived in the same town, and was the only child of a poor curate, whose wife, her mother, had been dead many years. She was very beautiful, as you can still see, after all these years of trouble and sorrow. Our father fell in love with her, and would have married her ; but when he applied for his parent’s consent he was met by a harsh refusal, and a statement of his father’s intention to cut him off with a penny, if he persisted in marrying this low-born girl, as the

writer of the letter, our grandfather, called her. At the same time our mother received a letter from his mother, beseeching her to pause before hurrying the man she professed to love into utter ruin ; the writer described in glowing colours the destitution to which he would be reduced, should his father be obliged to carry out his threat, and called on her to promise, formally and sacredly, that she would never marry him.

“ In an evil moment, worked upon by this specious letter, our mother gave the required promise, in the solemn manner demanded, told our father what she had done, and for a time all seemed settled. Two months had hardly elapsed, however, when her father caught cold while doing his parish duty, and, after a short and painful illness, died, leaving her utterly destitute. Owing to their extreme poverty, and the retiring disposition of her father, they were singularly unknown and friendless ; she had no one to give her a recommendation even for the situation of a governess, and after a few days’ fruitless endeavours to procure some such place, she was reduced to utter despair.

“ She went up to London, travelling on foot, sleeping in barns and haylofts by the way, econo-



mising her few wretched shillings, and purchasing barely sufficient food to keep life in her. She reached the city, but her appearance, which should have recommended her, was greatly against her. One afternoon, as she turned away hopeless from the door of a governess's agency, a feeling of weakness overcame her, and she sat down on a doorstep to rest. A gentleman passing was struck by the weakness and prostration of her attitude; he stopped and spoke to her, she raised her head with difficulty to answer him; their eyes met, and they recognised each other. He was our father.

"He took her at once, almost insensible as she was, to his lodgings, and sent for a doctor; by the time he arrived, however, she was in brain fever, brought on by anxiety, misery, and want. She lay there between life and death many weeks. When she was better, our father again asked her to marry him, and she again refused, telling him of the solemn promise exacted from her by his mother. Instead of letting her go then, as soon as she could be moved, when he saw she regarded her promise as binding, he allowed her to remain in his lodgings—she, an ignorant, innocent girl, until one day, when he


was out, the landlady burst in upon her like an avenging fury, loaded her with abuse, and ordered her to be off at once. She only waited till he came back, and told him what had happened. When she had done, he asked her what were her plans—how she intended to live, and where. She had never even thought of plans, and when he asked how she was to get her living, she knew full well that now she could never do so. If she had found it difficult before, when there was no blemish on her name, what would be said to her now, when the only reference she had to give was to the woman who had just insulted her, and the lover who was even then asking her about her future. Sadly she answered that she knew of no way in which she could earn her bread. Then he pressed her again and again to stay with him, not asking her now to marry him ; he seemed to regard her former answer to that question as sufficient, and he saw that, from the force of circumstances, he could escape so binding himself, and thus avoid incurring his father's displeasure. As might have been expected, placed as she was, she agreed to his plan ; and thus came about the state of affairs that led yesterday to our terrible discovery. For

me I cannot blame our mother as you do ; she was so placed that, wrong as was the course she chose, there was none other open before her. But for our father there was no such excuse, and it is he who is to be censured. And after all, he gained little or nothing by it, for at our grandfather's death it was found that the property to secure which our father had so greatly sinned, was heavily encumbered with debts, and had to be sold, in order that they might be paid off, only a very small residue remaining to our father when everything was settled. Minna, I do not intend to remain here, they must send me away to school. Now that I know everything, and see also how well it is known, I must get away ; every word uttered in a low tone seems a whisper directed against me, and it maddens me. I shall leave this, and when I get old enough I will enter the army ; there, if I do not meet an early death, I may win a glorious name ; at any rate, I cannot be worse off than I am here."

"I am glad you told me all that," answered Minna, slowly ; "though I would have died first, I think, before I had chosen such a course ; but, at least, it makes our mother seem better

than I had believed her to be for the last few hours ; for, I am ashamed to say, I was hard and cruel to her in my thoughts. We will not talk of our father," she went on hastily, seeing Herbert about to speak ; " I have misjudged once, I will not judge again."

And thus, after some discussion between Herbert and his mother, it was settled that he should go to an English public school ; and thither he was sent before many weeks more were over, Minna remaining quietly at home, reconciled again with her mother, who freely forgave her cruel hasty words ; and growing more tranquil, as time passed on, under the load of concealed sorrow that she bore about with her everywhere. For though she seldom now saw Captain Langham, when she did meet him there was a sense of security with him, a feeling of mutual understanding, that augmented the love she had acknowledged to herself she felt for him, and that preyed on her the more as she became convinced, day by day, of its hopelessness. And yet she could see he preferred her society to that of any of the other young ladies of the place ; she knew that his eye brightened as it met hers, that his hand trembled when it touched her, although




there were none of the *empresé* attentions to her that there used to be at the beginning of their intercourse, and she was certain he sometimes avoided her. She had thought she had strength and pride enough to bear his loss bravely, even to act a part, and lure him on to care for her, that she in her turn might scorn him; but such acting she found far more difficult than she had imagined it would be, under the first promptings of resentment.

She schooled herself well, and only at times yielded to the longing within her to be friendly and responsive to his evident desire for friendliness; generally she adopted a cold repellent manner, which accorded so ill with her character, and was so evidently assumed, that the young man concluded he must have offended her, and long waited for an opportunity of ascertaining if such was the case.

One dull sultry afternoon he set out for a walk, and took the path that led up the river, towards the shores of the lake. Buried in thought, he walked on and on, never raising his eyes from the ground; for his mind was busy and troubled, and the beauties of nature had no power to rouse him from his abstraction.

Suddenly a low, prolonged growling peal of thunder arrested his attention, and he looked up. The sky, dark when he set out, was now literally black with clouds, with a gleam of lurid light along the horizon. A terrible storm was near, and he was fully two miles from home; before he could walk half that distance, he knew the utmost fury of the tempest would be on him, and there was no shelter near. He was in the middle of a large field sloping down to the lake, and commanding a view of the shore for miles around. Not very far from where he stood was a pile of giant rocks, heaped in grotesque confusion by the water-side; there he might find shelter, and thither he hurried. As he approached the desired refuge, three or four bright flashes, followed almost immediately by a crashing peal of thunder, announced that the storm was already nearly overhead; two or three large drops fell at the same time, and quickening his steps he ran to the rocks.

As he turned an angle of one huge boulder, the giant of the group, he caught sight of a woman's figure crouched up in a corner, with her hands before her eyes, as though very much frightened at the scene of which she was about



to be an unwilling spectator. At the sound of his steps she looked up, and he found himself face to face with the person who, if the truth must be told, had been occupying the greater share of his thoughts for some days past.

"Oh! Captain Langham," she cried, springing to her feet and taking his hand with an eagerness that proceeded too evidently from fright, to flatter the vanity of even a more self-satisfied man than the one before her, "I thought I was all alone, and I was so frightened. It is foolish, I know, but I am afraid of lightning, particularly when I am by myself. It is not half so bad now you are here," and she smiled up in his face with those glorious eyes that he liked so well to look into.

"If I were to say I was glad of the thunderstorm, because it has given me an opportunity of meeting you here, you would not be angry, I hope?" he asked, looking down at her, half smiling, half anxiously.

"Oh! no," she answered; and then as a brilliant flash illuminated the country round, she turned from him, pressed her hands before her eyes, and leaned her head against the rock, trembling violently. He bent towards her a

minute, hesitated, drew back, and then as a peal of thunder rolled hoarsely round the mountains, and her agitation increased, he took her in his arms, laid her head on his breast, and soothed her with loving words and assurances of protection. She did not seem conscious of the change in her position, so extreme was her terror; and even when the rain began to fall in torrents, and he, placing her under the overhanging rock, interposed himself between her and the dash of water from the sky, she did not become aware of what was happening, and almost appeared as if she had fainted. At length the thunder peals rattled faintly in the distance, the rain cleared off, the sun came out smiling and bright over the dripping landscape, and she looked up with a confused, bewildered expression, as though the terror she had been suffering had in some way affected her brain.

"Where am I?" she asked feebly. "I feel as if something had happened."

"You have been frightened, dear," he answered. "Don't you remember the thunder?"

"Ah, yes," she said, with a shudder; then, noticing for the first time that he was holding her, she drew back with a slight blush, and said,



"I am afraid I have been a great trouble. It was unfortunate that you met me—for you, at least, I mean; as for me, I do not know what I should have done but for you; I think I should have had a fit, had I remained here alone."

"I am very glad I met you," he replied. "I have been wishing for some time to ask you why you are so cold and distant to me now; it used not to be so, and we are friends, you must remember."


"Friends," she repeated; "yes, I promised we should be so, and so we are; but in daily life it is hard to distinguish between friends and acquaintances; and, besides, if I have altered, as you say, towards you, have not you altered towards me? You avoid me now often; I can feel and see that you are kind to me always, but in a more distant and formal manner. My change to you comes not from myself, but is the consequence of your change to me."

Whilst she was speaking she believed this to be the case, and perhaps in a measure it was, but the real change began the day on which she overheard him say, on the hill-side, that it would be lucky for her if she escaped the same fate as her mother.

"You think me changed to you," he said; "is it possible that you have not recognized the reason of the alteration? It is because, my darling, you have grown too dear to me that I try sometimes to escape from the fatal spell of your society; it is because I fear, day by day, that words like these will break from my lips, that I watch every tone and word when I speak to you. The more dear you become to me, the more I desire to be near you and befriend you, the more I suspect myself and my motives, the more strict is the exile to which I condemn myself."

"But why is this?" faltered Minna at length, when she could command her voice to speak. "Ah, I know," she continued, his words on the hillside darting across her mind, and at the remembrance the flush of joy that had risen to her brow faded, and she turned away with a cold, calm look, but a choking sensation in her throat.

"Don't turn from me so, darling," he cried; "as I have met you here to-day, and I have spoken so far, I will go on, and will say all that is in my heart for you, dear. Perhaps you will pity me, though you may also condemn me when



you know my motives. It is because you are dear to me that I avoid you, as I have told you ; but I have not told you how dear to me you are. Long ago, before the day of that hateful picnic, I loved you well ; had you not been circumstanced as you were, I would have proposed for you and married you ; but knowing your position, I dared not, on account of my family ; still I flirted with you and amused myself, not thinking or caring what the consequences to you might be, anxious only to secure my own pleasure. That is all changed now," he went on, with a sigh. "I cannot marry you—I will not therefore flirt with you ; for myself, I know I should every hour be in danger of my feelings betraying my heart ; and little as I wish, by word or act of mine, to injure you now, I am aware that before long such scruples would vanish. I know with what indignant contempt you would then look upon me, and I should deserve it, for the part I fear playing, and which I am describing, would be that of a coward ; therefore, to avoid the pain of your scorn, to keep myself from incurring your censure and aversion, to guard myself from my own heart, are the reasons why I have shunned you latterly. I love you so

well that I would leave you for ever, never look upon your face again, if I felt that by staying I should make the right way difficult for you ; for myself, I am and must be content to bear it."

She was standing a little away from him as she listened, her face slightly averted, so that he could not see her expression ; when she turned next, and met his gaze, there was a calm, sweet look of contentment in her radiant eyes that he had never seen there before.

"Then you do care for me?" she asked. "Tell me it once again, I want to be quite sure."

"I do love you," he answered ; "not too well for your deserts, but too well for my own hopes of happiness. And you, darling?" he asked, taking her hand as it lay passive by her side, and raising it to his lips, "you also love me a little?"

"No, not a little," she replied, looking up into his face with a shy smile, that he hardly noticed, and with a sigh of disappointment he let fall her hand.

"I was mistaken," he said sadly. "I had thought you cared for me ; I need not have been so anxious for your peace, after all. And, indeed, it is better that one only of us should suf-

fer, though I think I should have felt happier if you had been sorry too."

"How do you know that only one of us will suffer?" she asked, in a low tone. "I said I did not care for you a little, but I do care very much—so much that you did right to avoid me these last few weeks, though I have often been wretched because you did so; so much that I fear we are wrong to talk thus. If it is any comfort to you to think I too love you, take all the comfort the thought can give you, for I do, and shall do so always. And now we had better part," she went on, trying to be firm and courageous, for she felt too much had been said by both that could never be unsaid, and that the less they saw of each other now the better. She was happy even in the sorrow of such a cruel parting, for she knew she had not thrown away her affection; it was returned, and the dreary, hopeless future was gilded by her present happiness.


"My darling, you are right," he answered, after a moment's hesitation; it was a struggle to him to leave her now, just when she had opened her heart to him, and when he would have liked to take her in his arms, and

shower sweet words and caresses upon her; but there was something in her quiet, trustful look and calm confidence in him that compelled him to overcome his own inclinations, and obey her wishes unhesitatingly.

"I will walk back with you," he went on; "you are wet, I did not see that before. Why did you not tell me?—I should not have kept you waiting."

"It is nothing," she answered, but shivering slightly as she spoke. "I am certainly rather wet, but I am strong and do not think I shall take any harm."

They talked then of commonplace topics; the heart of each was light, and yet they avoided, by tacit mutual consent, all discussion of what had made them happy. That kind of thing was all very well for lovers whose course of true love ran smooth, who were surrounded by helpful friends and relatives, ready to remove out of their path the slightest obstacle that might threaten to trip their careless feet. But here all talk on the theme so dear to most lovers must infallibly lead only to parting—parting, bitter and sudden, and for ever; therefore each shunned the subject, and was content to occupy



himself or herself with trivialities, and put aside the thought of that separation that must come sooner or later.

As they drew near her father's door, Captain Langham turned to her again with sudden earnestness.

"Friends still and for ever?" he asked, taking her hand as they stood on the doorstep.

"Friends, and for ever ; I can promise that now," she added, raising her candid eyes to his.

"We shall not meet again soon," he went on, "and it is better so ; I have asked for leave for two months, and when I come back perhaps we shall both have schooled ourselves to bear our fate better. For me, I could not endure this state of things long now, but I will try and conquer myself before I return."

"I can bear anything now," answered the girl ; "this day has made me so happy ! If I never have such another during my life, I shall still be satisfied ; and if so, then death will be all the brighter."

She did not speak sadly or dismally, but her lover shuddered to see the rapt look on her face ; it was like that of a spirit, and seemed too ethereal, too unearthly for his darling. He

pressed her hand without again speaking, and hurried away.

Up in her own room she sat for hours, musing. She had not taken off her wet things, and every now and then she shivered, but she seemed quite unconscious of the cold, and the expression of her face was intensely happy. Everything around her was glorified; even the dark room in which she sat was light with the light from her own heart, and the dingy old furniture seemed comfortable and respectable to her dazzled eyes.

After a time her mother came in.

"Why, Minna, what are you doing here?—and wet too, child!—you will catch your death of cold! Let me help you off with these things instantly!"

Then she roused herself.

"I am wet, I declare!" she exclaimed. "I was caught out in the thunderstorm, and I do not know what I should have done, only I met Captain Langham at the rocks where I took shelter, and he took care of me till it was all over, and brought me home."

"Minna, darling," said her mother, after a pause, "you see a great deal of that man, and



I sometimes think, from all I hear, that he likes you ; but, my child, beware ; it is very improbable that a man like him will ask you in marriage, and if not, such attention as he pays you is dangerous, and to be avoided."

"You are right, mother," the girl answered, after a moment's thought. "Captain Langham will never marry me—has no idea of such a thing ; but you need not be afraid for me, I understand that clearly ; and, besides, he goes on leave to-morrow, and we shall not see him again for some time."

Her tone was quiet, though the blood rushed to her cheeks ; her head was turned away, and her mother noticed nothing unusual. Poor child ! already this unnatural state of affairs was working its bitter fruit, deception ; and to the girl it seemed quite right that she should deceive, to screen her lover.

Now the days dragged on slowly with Minna Mounteagle ; she had no hope when she went out of catching a glimpse of his form before her return, no chance of meeting him in the street, and being greeted by a hearty hand-clasp and loving look from the honest brown eyes she loved so well. All this was over for a time, and

it was no wonder that the girl moped a little; added to this, she had caught cold the day of the thunderstorm, had been feverish and unlike herself ever since—sometimes was petulant with the younger children, and when obliged to walk or exert herself, seemed greatly tired on her return. She maintained, however, to her mother that she was all right, that her cold was better, and it was only the dulness of her life and the want of excitement that affected her. Ever since the day when she made the discovery of the slur on her birth, she had ceased to go out among the society of the place. At first her father tried to insist on her accompanying him, but she enlisted her mother on her side, and finally won the day.


She heard sometimes from Herbert; he was happy at school, did not seem to be very studious, but was evidently a great authority on matters connected with out-of-door sports, among the boys of his own age. There were a few sneaks among the boys, he said, but for the most part they were a jolly set of fellows; and his letters generally wound up with a message, either to his father or mother, to send him money.

"Herbert gets extravagant," remarked his father, after a letter had arrived one day, containing the third application for money within three months. "I cannot have this going on; he will get into such habits that when he goes into the army I shall not be able to keep him straight, and he will never succeed in living within the very moderate income I can allow him. Here, Minna, send him this, and tell him it is the last he shall have from either his mother or me for the next three months. A boy of fourteen has no business to require so much money to keep him going."

He put into her hand a five-pound note as he spoke, and Minna sent it that day, with the message that had been given her. She did not hear from him again for a week or two; and when he did write, it was only to express an opinion that the governor was a stingy old cock, and to inform her, likewise, that money was necessary for any kind of life that could be called life in this world.

"It makes things go so smooth," wrote the boy; "you may be what you like, you may even do what you like, and if you are well gilt the world will believe your birth noble, or your life

upright, no matter how insignificant be the one, how sullied the other. I see this every day in the school around me," he went on; "the greatest sneaks will be toadied and flattered, if they are the children of rich people, and have money to spend freely; the finest heart will be passed by unnoticed, if it beat in the bosom of a poor boy. This is the world as I see it. Would I had the chance of one day being rich! Next in power comes, I think, a popular manner. It has far less weight than money, but it is in my reach. I shall study to be popular, perhaps it may lead me some day on the right road to gain the other. You want to know why I use so much money, knowing as I do that my father is not a rich man. The reason is simply this: there is here a boy who knows our story; he is fond of expensive pleasures of all kind, and is generally out of pocket. Then he comes and screws me, threatening to tell all about me if I do not come down with the ready. I cannot bear the idea of being shown up here; I am getting on well, I like the boys and they like me, but how long would that last were my true position known? Not one hour, I tell you; and I, knowing this, give him money to keep quiet, and let my



secret be hid. I have stopped him for a time now, but it cannot be for very long ; and when I write for money I must have it, so do you, like a good girl, get some together for me ; and do not show this letter—I do not wish to pain our mother, and our father would probably laugh at my feelings on this subject.”

Here the letter ended, leaving Minna in a terrible state of bewilderment and confusion. For in all the world he could not have turned to a worse person for help in such a matter. She had no allowance, never had a penny of money in her possession, and had no prospect of being able to get any ; it is true, he did not want it just then, but it was not likely she would be one bit more able to help him whenever he did ask for it. However, there was no use fretting about it, and in her weak state the anxiety of mind really did her harm, so that her mother noticed her looks, and again asked if she was ill. But she declared herself to be very well ; and after a day or two she shook off her depression, and went about the house as gaily as formerly, with a bright colour and eyes like stars.

She had not been long free from anxiety on

Herbert's account, however, when one day she received a hurried imploring letter from him, entreating her to send him a pound at once—less than that would not do, and he must have it immediately.

Going up to her room, she sat down on her bedside and wept bitterly. She had persuaded herself that all danger of such a call was past, and now that it came on her thus, her self-possession and control gave way. She was so completely in the dark as to what evils might accrue to her brother, if she failed to do as he desired, that his position assumed in her eyes a critical appearance, which most certainly it never possessed, had she but known the true state of affairs.

She could think of no plan but to tell their mother, notwithstanding his absolute prohibition of such a course; and accordingly she rose to do so, when a bright thought flashed through her brain. She had a very handsome gold brooch, given her some years ago by her father; she was not in the habit of wearing jewelry, and as she hardly ever put it on, its disappearance would not be likely to be remarked. She now hunted it out, put on her hat, and set off to the nearest jeweller, with the intention of

selling her only ornament for just as much as she could get the man to offer, she having no idea of its real value. The shop she went into was a large one, and sold other things besides jewelry. There was another counter at the far end, and people were standing there when she entered. She took no notice of them, but going straight to the department she wanted, asked what they would give her for the brooch. She was so frightened and ashamed of her unusual occupation, that she dared not raise her eyes, or look around to see if anyone was near her; but whilst the shopman weighed and tried and examined the brooch, she was sensible that some one came in, and stood beside her.

After a good deal of examination, the jeweller returned her the brooch. He could not purchase such an article, he said; he was quite ignorant as to its value, which lay chiefly in the workmanship and design, and as old gold, the only way in which he could buy it, it was comparatively valueless. If she particularly wished to sell it, he could give her ten or perhaps at most fifteen shillings for it—no more. It was not enough, and she took up the trinket sorrowfully, prepared to go and try her luck again in some

other place. As she went out, she became aware that the person who had been standing beside her was following her; she looked up, and started with amazement on recognising Captain Langham.

"Why, how ill you look!" he exclaimed, as he gazed at her pale, frightened face, for even the brightness that had dawned on it when she recognised him, could not take away the traces of recent unhappiness. "Why," he went on, "you have wasted to a shadow! Surely something is the matter with you?"

"Nothing," she answered uneasily. "I caught a little cold the last day I saw you, and it has left me rather weak; but that is all."

"And what is the meaning of the business you were engaged in just now?" he asked again, after a pause. "I did not know your father was in bad circumstances."

"Neither is he," she answered; then continued hurriedly: "Oh! Captain Langham, I have been so worried lately, I don't know what I am doing sometimes. If ever I wanted a friend to confide in, I do now; for Herbert won't let me tell mother, and I sometimes think he must have got himself into a scrape, or that the boy he speaks

of will do him mischief; and it troubles me so, it keeps me awake at night trying to devise some way to help him."

"It is something connected with your brother, then, that worries you?" he asked, adding to himself: "I always thought him an ill-conditioned cub, and it is evident he must be so."

Greatly relieved at having some one to whom she could unburden her mind, Minna related, as well as she could remember, the substance of his last two letters, and felt happier and lighter as she did so. They were walking along through the country roads, having left the town by this time some way behind; suddenly he stopped, and, taking her hands in his, asked her:

"Is this what you call treating me as a friend? Here have you been worrying your poor brain about a wretched little sum of money, trying to sell your little treasures to raise it, and never coming to me, your friend, to lend it to you."

She smiled a little as she answered:

"I could not do that, because I have not the least idea when I could have paid you, and I never knew that money-lending was one of the attributes of a friend; at least," she added, with

a faint touch of sauciness, "it was never mentioned in my agreement."

"Well, but you will let me help you now, as I have found out all about your trouble, won't you?" he pleaded; "and if you do, I'll reward you by giving you a piece of advice for your brother, which I think he must be a stupid boy not to have discovered for himself already."

"What is it?" she asked.


"No," he laughed, "that won't do; your promise, first, to take my help—my advice after."

"But I can't promise to do as you wish; indeed I can't," she urged. "I will go back now to Macarthy's, and see what they will give me for it; but take money from you I cannot."

"And why not?" he asked quietly. "If Mrs. Macmaster, or any of the other ladies, were your friend, would you not ask her to lend you money, even without telling her what it was for, as you have told me?"

"If I had a chance of repaying her I might," she answered; "but with prospects such as my present ones, I could not even do that."

"Then you must count friendship as worth very little," he said, smiling. "Well, as I cannot overcome your scruples in that way, I must



try some other. Tell me, is it possible I can move you?"

"No, you need not try," she replied mournfully, glancing up into his face; he was looking singularly happy, almost triumphant, one might say, and a cruel sense of disappointment struck her as she met his smiling gaze. This friend in whom she had so trusted, to whom she had given her whole heart, in the unreserved warmth of her nature, felt so little for her trouble and distress, understood her so ill, that he had first offered her the help of his money; and when she refused, as he should have known she would refuse, instead of seeming annoyed or grieved that he was not able to be of use, he simply stood before her laughing, and no doubt amused at her trouble for such a trivial cause. Her eyes filled with tears, and she turned away quickly, that he might not see them; he did see, however, and taking both her hands in his, he forced her to look him in the face whilst he said:

"You never asked me what brought me back so much sooner than I had intended coming. I think you might have shown so much interest in me, Minna."

His manner and tone were peculiar, and his


eyes met hers, and forced her to look at him in spite of herself, and in spite of the bitter tears of mortification and disappointed love that would rise in them. She gazed at him, for she could not help it; there was an attraction in his eye that mesmerised her into passive submission, but she spoke not a word. He repeated at length, "Are you not curious, then, to know why I have returned? Won't you ask me?"

"I suppose your leave was cancelled, or that you wanted something here," she answered at length with difficulty; "there were plenty of reasons why you should come back, and I was not astonished."

"Plenty of reasons," he repeated after her. "I know of only one, and that one you have just mentioned; I wanted something here, and I came back for it. Darling, that something is yourself."

He tried to take her in his arms as he spoke, but his words seemed to have broken the spell that bound her, for she stepped back quickly and said:

"Don't you remember what you said to me down by the lake one day—that you loved me so well you could give me up, and never see m



again, if you felt tempted to do anything that might injure me? You are forgetting those words now, I fear; my heart may be too weak to defend me, you must protect me against yourself."

"All that is changed now," he answered quickly; "when I told you that, I fancied I loved you as well as I could love—I have found out my mistake since, and I am come to rectify it." She drew back a step as he spoke, looking at him with distrustful eyes; he saw it, and said gently: "Are you afraid of me? Indeed you have no cause to be so; if I loved you too well before to harm you, you are a thousand-fold dearer to me now. I thought then I was strong enough to condemn you and myself to a blighted life, for the sins of others; since I have been away I have found that, as long as there is a possibility of my ever winning you for my wife, I must try to do so. I cannot live happy or contented without you; only near you am I at rest, without you I am miserable and dejected, seeking always some distraction that may take my mind off the contemplation of the dear one I have left behind."

"Is it really true, this that you are telling


me?" she asked breathlessly. "Am I dreaming, or am I really with you—" She turned faint and dizzy, and as her lover supported her in his arms, he noticed again how dreadfully ill she was looking. Presently she recovered, and listened with a gentle, pleased smile to his loving, passionate words. After a time, however, she raised her head from its downcast drooping attitude, and asked him kindly, but with a nervous tremor in her voice,

"Should you be much grieved, dear, if we had to part now?—a real separation I mean, such as that of death, for instance."

"Child, don't torture me," he answered almost angrily; "you cannot think what you are saying when you ask such a question; it is heedless, and unlike you, to inflict unnecessary pain."

"But if the pain was necessary, if there was a meaning in my question," she persisted timidly, "what then?"

"Then, darling, I would pray to die first. I do not say that your death would kill me—too often those who would most welcome death live the longest; but I do say that apart from you life would be bitter to me, and the sooner it was over the happier I should account myself."



She laid her head against him with a soft, caressing action as she answered :

“ I have done wrong, dearest, I know, and this is my punishment. Do you remember the day of the thunderstorm?—the happiest day of my life, I used to think it ; but I was mistaken, for I am happier now. However, you may recollect that day you said you could never marry me, but we were to be friends always. I loved you too well for that, too well for my own safety, under such an arrangement. I knew that my courage would fail me to be a cold, formal friend to you ; and to me, at least in the picture of the years before me, there was more of torment than happiness. I caught cold that day from the wetting, and since then I have been ill, getting gradually worse. I had no reason to wish that I should get better—rather the contrary ; death seemed to me such a happy release ; and so I have let the matter run on, taking no care of myself ; and now, when I would give the world if I had it for a few more years of life, I feel my days are numbered. Don’t grieve for me,” she added, passionately, for the look on her lover’s face pained her beyond endurance. “ I put

myself in God's place, judging the future before me, and I have got my reward. It is only for you I am sorry, only for your sake I suffer—for pity's sake, do not make my trial harder to bear than it already is!"

Like one stunned by a sudden blow the young man sat beside her, his face buried in his hands; only a sob escaped from him as she finished speaking, and then they both remained silent and motionless. At length he started to his feet, and helping her up, turned back with her in the direction of the town. There was a look of determination in his haggard eyes, a firmness in his step and manner, that told of some fixed purpose, but still he had not spoken.

"Where are we going?" she asked at length, timidly; "and, dearest, you have forgiven me, have you not? Say you are not angry."

"Angry—hardly," he replied. "I should have known my own heart sooner, and I should, in the first place, never have given in to the prejudices of the world. If I had from the first made up my mind to judge for myself and act for myself, how different all this might have been! But mind, I do not accept your view of the case as settled. I am taking you now to Dr. Denham.

I shall tell him what you have told me, and we will see if he may not be able to do something for you. I don't, and can't believe that death will take you from me ; it would be too terrible !”


He turned away his head, and they walked on silently. After a time Minna urged him to let her go home then, and go to the doctor's to-morrow with her mother. He held out at first against this, as though there would be some special charm in her going at once with him ; but at length she carried her point, and he returned home with her, to ask her father's consent for her marriage, and then talk over his plans.

When Minna, radiant and happy, burst into her mother's room, Mrs. Mounteagle looked with astonishment at the change in her child's appearance. Her eyes, always bright, were now literally dazzling ; her cheeks burnt with a crimson flush, and her step was as light as though she trod on the air.

“Mother, I am so happy !” she exclaimed, throwing her arms round her mother's neck, and telling her all that had happened. As for Mrs. Mounteagle, when she heard that Captain Langham actually intended to marry her daughter, her contentment knew no bounds. He remain-

ed to tea with them ; and Minna, with tears and self-accusation, related to her mother how she had caught cold, and purposely neglected it. It was decided she should see the doctor next day, for, now that the excitement began to wear off, the mother's eye could detect a fearful alteration in her child.

Captain Langham and her father, however, would see nothing wrong ; nothing, at least, that rest and happiness would not cure. Their plans were, if the doctor's verdict was favourable, they should be married, as privately as possible, in a month's time, and Captain Langham was to sell out at once. As soon as they were married they were to set sail for Australia, where Captain Langham intended to set up as a sheep-farmer, or, rather, he, having no experience and some capital, intended to buy into a well-established run, where the management would be in the hands of practical men, he supplying the capital, and in time hoping to work up a knowledge of the business. If the doctor's opinion was not favourable—but that was a view of the case they would not, dared not take. Thus the evening passed away, in busy planning, in hopeful anticipations for the future, and gay nonsen-



sical chatter, till, as he was about to leave for the night, Langham asked Minna,

“ Well, what about the money for your brother, and the piece of advice I was to give him—may I lend it to you now ?”


“ No, indeed,” she answered, laughing, “ less now than ever. I will get it from my father, as if I wanted it for myself, but you may send the advice.”

“ You don’t deserve I should tell it you,” he said ; “ however, under existing circumstances, I suppose I must. It is this : Next time that fellow comes to him threatening to tell his story unless Herbert pays him to keep it a secret, let Herbert give him a right good thrashing, and promise him a repetition of it if he hears a word of the secret breathed about the school. That’s what he should have done at first ; and, take my word for it, it will be found very effectual in putting a stop to any annoyance.” So saying, he took his leave, full of blissful anticipations for the future, and light at heart that he had found strength and courage to return and win his wife, in spite of private opposition and public opinion.

He had forgotten that in this life sorrow dogs

the footsteps of joy—that the happiness towards which we stretch out our hands ever eludes our grasp; he had forgotten even the forebodings raised by Minna's words, and doubted not that the next day would rise more brightly for him and her than had ever any preceding day, and that old Dr. Denham would laugh her melancholy fears away. He thought only of a joyful future, only of the happy present—he saw no dim shadow of an unearthly presence hovering over the pictures he drew for himself of his betrothed; and when at length sleep visited eyes that were long too occupied with blissful visions to close, the charmed domain of dreamland was not disturbed by any presentiment of the dark and terrible angel whose heavy wings already overshadowed the house where Minna lay in sleep, broken only by fancies as blissful as his own.

And the day dawned again bright as his heart had prophesied it would; and the song of the robin, and the shrill piping of the thrush, woke him to life and happiness again, and the glad morning sun streamed in at his windows, gilding curtains and table with its gay light; and he knew not that songs as glad floated into her room without arousing her, that the same golden sun-



light looked in there also, playing on the heavy masses of her hair as it lay motionless on the pillow, touching her rounded arm and taper fingers as they hung idly over the bedside. But the Summer sun, though its beams flickered over her lovingly, brought no light to her eye, no warmth to her cheek ; and the songs of the birds whom she had loved, and who had been to her as friends, would rouse her to responsive gladness never more—the beauty of the daylight and the dewy gleam of morning no more would dazzle her sight with its gladness ; for while she slept, death, who comes to one young, beautiful, and beloved as the destroyer, had come to her, and carried her far away from the past which she had found so hard to bear, from the present in which she was so happy, from the future for which, as it had that evening opened before her, she so ardently longed.

They found her thus. She had burst a blood-vessel during the night, but it seemed that her end must have been peaceful, and there was no pained look on the face that was yet more beautiful in death than it had been in life. It is unnecessary to speak of the grief of the heart-broken lover ; by those who have mourned over

one beloved the bitterness of this sorrow can be conceived, those who have no such experience are happy, and need not seek to learn what no words can describe.

The miserable parents, doubly miserable in that they felt their sin had some share in drawing on them this fatal blow, removed from Sloane before many months had elapsed, and died—her mother one year, and her father three years after.

Our narrative now follows more immediately the fortunes of the boy Herbert Mounteagle, whom we again meet, after passing over a period of between seven and eight years.




CHAPTER III.

HERBERT MOUNTEAGLE lay at full length amongst the luxuriant grass and ferns in a magnificent wooded park, one sunny June morning. The fierce Summer sun streamed down through the green screen of leaves overhead, the grasshopper's chirrup thrilled the sultry air, the birds were silent among the branches, the mountains, seen through an opening in the woodland, looked blue and misty—not a single little white cloud broke the intense colour of the firmament; all was warm and lazy, and luxuriating in life and beauty. And there Herbert Mouteagle lay on his back, with his hat well pulled over his eyes, languidly picking blades of grass and chewing them, dreaming his time idly, and, it seemed, not pleasantly away, in spite of the beauty around, if one might judge by the short, bitter sighs that

broke from him at intervals. He had grown up a fine tall, stalwart man, with a handsome, gentlemanly face, remarkable for its intensity of expression. Moreover, whatever feeling his face expressed, it rarely failed of pleasing beholders; and that not because his sentiments were generally of a nature that would have met with approval, but because, by mere beauty of feature, the expression of his thoughts on his countenance was so modified as to lend it a charm the thoughts themselves but rarely possessed. He had some noble qualities, some fine characteristics, but all these seemed in a curious manner warped or bent aside, to allow free play to the worst features of his character. Very fascinating he could be to anyone; and indeed, as he once wrote to his sister that he intended studying popularity, so he had grown up a general favourite, capable of being all things to all men—yes, and to all women too, a much more difficult thing to attempt, but one in which he succeeded perfectly.

He lay, as we have described, for some time, perhaps half an hour or more, without giving any other sign of life than the impatient sighs before mentioned, when suddenly, with one agile,



vigorous bound, he sprang to his feet, and remained for a minute or two with head erect and searching, eager eyes, scanning the green glades that stretched away in every direction. What a fine-looking young fellow he is, as he stands thus, with the wild, untamed grace of an Indian in his look and attitude. A powerful face, too, it is, as it promised to be in early life, foretelling great deeds, either good or evil, as circumstances or temptation may form him in the battle of life.

He stood and waited, his eyes fixed with eager intentness on an approaching figure. Nearer it came and nearer; now it is quite close, and he steps forward to meet it. Need it be said the figure is that of a woman?

No, not a woman either, only a girl, but one well deserving notice, as she rode forward into the sunlight on her beautiful black thoroughbred. She had no groom. Ethel Courtenay seldom troubled herself with one, especially among the shady lanes and woodland paths in her father's noble domain. It would have been impossible for a stranger to guess from her manner whether she expected to meet Herbert Mouteagle or not. She simply reined up her horse and held out her hand, saying,

“Why, Mr. Mounteagle, is that you? And how came you here?”

As she sat gazing down on him, her hand still resting in his, he thought he had never seen her look more lovely. Imagine a very young girl, perhaps eighteen, certainly not more, with one of those most charming of all charmingly shaped faces, broad across the forehead, and curving gently into a small and perfectly formed chin; pale, clear complexion, with glowing, flexible, mobile lips, the one fault of that fascinating mouth being a want of tenderness in the smile, not perceptible until the rest of the dazzling face was well known, and imperfections had time to make themselves visible; a very straight nose, standing out a little from the face, not of the Grecian type; and shining out from under tawny level brows, with a strange passionate look that beguiled so many with wild hopes never to be realised, a pair of golden brown eyes, of that peculiar colour so rarely seen, and which is endowed with a more powerful fascination than any other shade, no matter how soft and beautiful, seems to possess.

This girl besides had golden-brown hair, that

matched the colour of her eyes, and was drawn back plainly behind her ears, where it was rolled, coiled, and plaited in marvellous profusion. She was small and slight, with a perfect girlish figure, that moved gently with the motion of the horse, and was yet full of dignity in every attitude. It was a face and form made to be loved, and well Ethel Courtenay knew it, without, at the same time, seeming to be aware of it. One would have said a more child-like and unconscious being it would be impossible to imagine; yet she was an arch coquette, and under that trustful, fascinating manner, cared for nothing but her own amusements, and to swell the list of her conquests, by adding to it every stranger she met.

Now, as she uttered her few simple words of greeting, and looked down on him with those strange unfathomable golden eyes, the love long kept down in him found partial utterance in the reply :

“ You know I couldn’t pass the day without seeing you, so I lay in wait here. You are not angry with me, are you ? ”

“ Angry with you ! ” she answered, smiling softly down on him, but at the same time dis-

engaging her hand—"oh! no, I suppose not. Will you come up and see my father to-day?"

"No, not to-day," he replied. "I only came to tell you that I am going to-morrow. I have been gazetted to the —th, and must join at once."

"At once!—must you really?" she asked, bending lower towards him. "Surely you could spare a few days longer? I am certain, if you chose, you could at least stop till after the ball. You know you are engaged to me for the first waltz; and it is only three days off now."

"I cannot stay, indeed," he answered, distressed and miserable at being obliged to refuse her anything. "I have orders to report myself to-morrow. I put off going as long as I could; but now it must be done."

She looked displeased and hurt—not that she felt hurt in the meaning that word usually conveys, but she was wounded in her pride, to think that this man, who was, and had been for some time, utterly and entirely at her beck and call, should dare to let his future career stand in the way of one of her passing whims. As for Herbert Mounteagle, he saw the look of annoyance on her face, and felt as if

he could even give up all hope of the future that lay before him, sooner than oppose even this foolish wish of hers. But before he had time to utter the words that rose to his lips, she spoke.

"That is all nonsense," she said, positively—"I know you could stay if you chose; but you are trying to see if you can annoy me. You are mistaken, however, if you think I care a straw about your staying or going—I can get twenty other partners for the dance; and those too more willing to please me."

"Surely you believe me?" he gasped, catching her horse's rein as she prepared to move forward. "Before Heaven, it is the truth I am telling you! If I waited till after the ball, as you wish, I should lose my commission, my future would be spoiled; and yet, if you tell me to stay, I love you so utterly, I am willing to give up all for you. Only," he went on, more earnestly, feeling that the first step was taken, and all must be said now if he would be listened to—"only if I do so, you must promise to be mine, as I am yours—to love me through life, in spite of opposition and trial; for remember I give up all for you, and am content, if so

you will it, to seek my bread in some other profession that shall enable me to keep nearer you. Dearest, do you still wish me to stay?"

As he uttered the last words, he raised his eyes, full of eager anxiety and expectation, to her face, his hand still resting on the rein, waiting for her answer. Her head was bent down and half averted, a slight pink flush had risen to her cheek, and she seemed a picture of love, innocence, and tender pity as she sat thus thinking, before venturing on a reply. She well knew, though she pretended ignorance, that the fact was as Herbert Mounteagle had stated it—that his remaining, as she wished, would ruin his future; and yet for the pleasure of showing her power, of proving how completely he was her slave, she would have persuaded him to remain, when she cared nothing for him, but as a toy to amuse idle hours, and to be thrown aside, broken and useless, when something more valuable or pleasing presented itself. And as she listened to his pleading words, her mental commentary was,

"What impertinence to speak thus to me! Does he think for one minute I would forego all the riches and luxuries I enjoy as my father's

heiress, for love in a cottage with him? And that's what it would be, if I was to do as he wishes; for papa wouldn't hear of it, even if I liked him. No, my fine fellow, until you have something besides your good looks to recommend you—and they are certainly great—you will have no chance with Ethel Courtenay. But I'll make you stay for the dance, notwithstanding, unless I am greatly mistaken." Then, raising her head, with a slight smile, that might mean anything, she replied,

"Really, Mr. Mounteagle, I never thought you would have exacted a full spoken promise of such a nature from me when I asked you to stay. If it really costs you your commission, of course I know how it will be my duty to act, in order to make up that loss to you; but when I ask a friend to do such a small thing for me, I cannot bribe him by a promise, though he may be as sure of his recompense as if I did."

The young man looked up into her softly smiling face, now radiant with self-congratulation at what she called the clever manner in which she had evaded binding herself, whilst yet persuading him to remain. He saw the smile,

but did not mark its lack of tenderness and good faith, as he answered,

“Surely I will not claim a promise from you, since you know all that your request implies. I would not even have said what I did, but that I feared you might not understand that, in begging me to renounce all my hopes in life for a few hours’ enjoyment, you were laying yourself under a tacit obligation to make amends to me for the loss I should sustain in obeying you.”

There was something noble in Herbert Mount-eagle’s character, warped as it had been by the surroundings of his early life. In this, his first passionate boyish love, he showed it by the sublime infatuation that tempted him to risk all on the good faith of a girl who refused to give him any guarantee for the uprightness of her intentions. She felt this a little as he took her hand again, and said, “My darling, I am yours now—do with me as you will.”

For one brief moment she thought, “Oh! why is he not noble, distinguished, famous? Then perhaps I might care for him; or, at best, I should be proud of him, and would give him all he would want by marrying him. Now,

though his looks please my eye, and his words my ear, yet, after all, he is not eligible in any way, and must meet the usual fate of such pleasant but unfortunate people." Then she answered, smiling, "Well, it is settled; you stay for the dance—that is all right. I am sure you will enjoy it."

"But don't you think," he asked, hesitatingly, "that it is almost a pity I should throw up my profession? With your love promised me, and the hope of winning you, before me, I could do great things; and I should so like to give you a name you might be proud of, instead of one unknown and tarnished like mine."

"Do as you like," she replied, pettishly, withdrawing her hand, and striking her steed smartly with her light riding-whip. She did not, with all her faults, care to repeat the deceiving words she had just uttered; and, sure of his keeping his promise to meet her at the ball, she determined to leave him now, and see him no more till then. But she had forgotten his detaining hand on the rein; and he, startled by her words, tightened his hold instinctively, so that the horse, after rearing madly upward, came down again, and, unable to get away,

stood quivering and trembling at treatment it was so unaccustomed to receive.

"I cannot let you go," he cried, "till you have given me your promise; something tells me you are not acting fairly by me. Answer me, dearest, honestly and truly—will you marry me, if I do for you what you ask?"

"Let me go," she answered, angrily, her temper failing her, as she feared her prey would escape. "Do you think," she went on, recklessly, resolved, if she could not keep him, at least to wound him—"Do you think my father would let me marry a man without means or profession, even if I promised him ever so freely? He would tell me very plainly that it was for my money you wished to have me, and that I was a fool to be deceived by your pretty speeches."

The young man's face flushed to the roots of his hair at these cruel words; then it paled again, and his lips quivered as he cried,

"That base thought cannot surely be yours! Say that it is not—that you do not believe it. I will not let you go till you tell me that you know and feel that love only, love which you saw and encouraged, has drawn this mad avowal


from me. You know you encouraged me," he continued, too absorbed in his passion and despair to notice the gathering tempest in Ethel Courtenay's face, and to mark the nervous twitching of the reins, and the tightening of her fingers on the light riding-whip. "You saw how I loved you, how I followed your every motion, hung on your every word; and you smiled on me, talked to me, always wanted my assistance, always was glad of my presence, till any man would have been beguiled as I was, and would have thought himself happy in having excited some interest in your mind."

"Stand aside, sir," she interrupted. "If, as you say, I smiled on you, and talked to you, you should have taken my attentions for simple kindness, as they were meant, and not built upon them an airy castle of your own hopes, for the fall of which I am to be blamed forsooth. I have had enough of this; now let me pass on."

But he still held the reins. All the affection of his nature, since his mother's death pent-up within himself, had been lavished on this girl, and he could not, and would not see that she was utterly and entirely unworthy of it—a cold-headed, heartless woman, who was pretty sure to break

the heart of any man who should love her with truth and constancy. If she had been what he thought her, how different the young man's life might have been ! He had great capabilities of good in him, which she could have brought out, which were even now trying to struggle up, through the overlying growth of evil that had made great progress in him, through all the uncared-for neglected years which had elapsed since the death of his parents. He could not give her up yet, he must make one more trial to move her to gentler feelings ; and, with this intention, he tried to take her hand, eager to soothe her anger, and gain, if possible, one word of tender interest, to take with him on the journey that was now inevitable. She saw his movement, and passionate always, feeling her reins free, raised her whip and struck her horse again. The spirited animal dashed madly forward, and she was soon lost to sight in the woodland.

He went on his homeward way, full of angry and bitter thoughts. She had dared to tell him he only sought her for her money ; he had heard her, and after that had still tried to move her stony heart. But he would be revenged ; he was



determined on that. She had insulted him—she should repent it bitterly! He knew enough of the world to know that patience will win all, or most things—yes, even revenge. And then a thought struck him—what should his vengeance be? Would he have the heart, even if he should ever have the power, to punish this young and lovely being, whom he had once so passionately loved? He could not tell yet. Time enough to decide when the power was in his hands; to gain it he would work and wait, leaving everything else for circumstances to determine. He knew, too, that, in spite of all he had passed through and suffered from her that day, he still cared for her. He had been for months nursing wild hopes, investing her with gracious attributes, and though her actions and words that morning should have crumbled his airy edifice to ruins, and shown her in her natural cold, hard character, they had not quite succeeded in so doing; and it would be still in her power, by a kind word, to bring back the captive that had so nearly escaped from her snares.

But his faith in women, as represented by the ideal he had formed in his own mind, was shattered, never to be rebuilt. Beautiful, fascinating,

bewildering, and dangerous, he knew and believed them now to be ; tender, innocent, loving, and loveable, as he had once fancied *her*, he could think them never more.

CHAPTER IV.

“WELL, what sort of fellow is the new-comer, Matthews?” asked Captain Morton, walking into the ante-room of the barracks, in the little town of Banisford.

Matthews, the man addressed, looked up from some writing over which he was bending, and appeared, for a minute or two, unable to concentrate his attention on the matter in question.

“What are you at?” the Captain went on, leaning towards him, and trying to read over his subaltern’s shoulder.

“Wareblows,” shouted the young man, springing to his feet, shuffling his papers together under his blotting-pad, and facing his Captain with a mocking air. “Now wouldn’t you like to know what I was doing? You won’t, though, for I am not going to give you a chance of exercising your confounded satirical wit on me.”

"Don't trouble yourself about telling me, lad," laughed Morton. "I know very well it's some more poetry, addressed to those young ladies on the hill, or some other of the numerous divinities you favour."

Matthews, a small, slight, fair man, not good-looking, but generally liked in society, from his great flow of small talk, and capability both for chaffing and being chaffed, winked knowingly, and answered:

"You think yourself very clever, Morton, don't you? But I should advise you to get up earlier in the morning if you want to catch Hector Matthews napping. No, you don't see this," he added, folding up the paper, and putting it into his breast-pocket. "However, you were asking what the youngster is like who has just joined. You'll take to him, I think. He's rather wanting in respect to those of longer standing than himself; but, for all that, he seems a gentleman, and, besides, knows very well how to take care of himself."

"Oh! Morton, I'll tell you all about our first interview with the new comer. Matthews was too closely concerned in the matter to like speaking of it; but I have no scruples. And,

oh! ain't it good to take a rise out of Matthews? He's so precious fond of making free with others, that he 'kinder feels it onnatural,' as the Yankees say, when another does so with him."

Thus spoke young Slingsby, junior ensign, save one, the new arrival, whose advent was causing all this talk. Slingsby seated himself, as he spoke, on one end of the table, in a languid manner, saying, as he did so, to Captain Morton, who had placed himself astride on a chair, "It's a shame to bully fellows with parade and drill in weather like this."


"And you get enough of it, too, Slingsby," said Morton, laughing. "The Sergeant-Major told me this morning you were without exception the very awkwardest, stupidest young gent as he ever came across. I'll lay a bet at evens with you that this stranger will know his drill before you, though I haven't seen him yet, and don't know what he's like."

"Oh! as to that," grumbled Slingsby, "I could learn fast enough if I liked; but I'm afraid of injuring the brain if I do too much at a time."

"No fear of that," said Matthews, out of the depths of an easy-chair, in which he had snugly

ensconced himself. "As far as the brain is concerned, take my word for it you may be perfectly sure you have none. The fear of finding that out is doubtless what has kept you from exerting yourself."

"Stop that, Matthews!" cried the lad, a little angrily. "At any rate, I'll tell your adventure now, and let those who hear it judge for themselves where both your mind and manners were when you got into that scrape. You know," he continued, turning to Morton, "the new fellow is young Mounteagle, a very nice-looking chap too, though perhaps our friend there would say he was not his style. About two hours ago he came in here, and sat down to read the papers. Matthews, there, could not keep quiet for long, you may imagine, so he presently began to talk. 'You have just joined, have you not?' To this of course he got an answer in the affirmative. He was then asked his name, which he told us. Then Matthews, seeing he was a quiet, silent young fellow, took it into his wise head he would be just the subject on whom he could play a practical joke, and thus relieve his superabundant animal spirits. However, he thought it prudent first of all to



ascertain if his new acquaintance was quite as green as he looked. He therefore asked him if this was his first experience of military life ; and hearing that it was so, resolved on a course of action that would, he thought, afford him some little amusement, and expose the gullibility of the young fellow before him. Accordingly, after a few minutes' pause, to arrange his plans, Matthews began :

“‘I say, Mounteagle, do you know that your conduct is not at all *en règle* with our etiquette for new-comers? That's the Major's chair (when he's with us, when he's not it descends to the senior Captain) that you're sitting in, and you must turn out at once. If he or any of the others were to come in just now, it would not be liked, and I should catch it for not having warned you.’

“‘Indeed!’ replied Mounteagle, coolly, without making the slightest movement to vacate the chair. ‘Well, if they do come in and object, you can tell them to settle the matter with me—you have done your duty by warning me.’

“His lazy, indifferent tone deceived Matthews, who thought, ‘A cool hand, no doubt, but not an energetic person,’ so he answered,

“‘That wouldn’t do at all—they would say, “You know what you ought to have done, Matthews, if he didn’t choose to move when you told him, you should have put him out by force.” However, I don’t like proceeding to extremes, so I’m sure you’ll do as I tell you, without troubling me to take active measures.’

“‘Yes, no doubt it would be a trouble,’ replied the cool youngster, glancing lazily, but, as it seemed to me, rather significantly, from his long, well-knit limbs to his tormentor’s fragile-looking form, ‘so I should advise you,’ he added, ‘to dispense with that performance, particularly as I’m uncommonly comfortable here, and don’t mean to stir. Let anyone who wants to put me out, come and do it himself.’

“‘Don’t you mean to stir? We shall see,’ replied our friend here, losing his temper at this quiet opposition, and rising as he spoke, he advanced towards Mounteagle, who, laying his paper on his knee, looked at him without speaking. It was a glance that would have cowed most people, as you will understand when you see the fellow; and even Matthews

was so far quelled by it that he changed his mode of attack, and, by a rapid flank movement, succeeded in taking the enemy in the rear, as the despatches say. Not that the enemy made the smallest effort to prevent him doing so, but sat quite still, until the chair was lifted up from behind with a view to dislodging him. Then he threw his whole weight back, bringing it quickly to the ground again, at the same moment shouting out, 'Hands off there, I say!'

"The change in his voice should have put Matthews on his guard, but it didn't—he's obstinate when he takes a thing into his head, you know—so he raised the chair a second time, when, its occupant springing up with a suddenness on which his enemy had never counted, it fell forwards on the floor, dragging our little Lieutenant with it. Before he had time to pick himself up, Mounteagle pounced on him, and seizing him by the collar of the coat, half dragged, half carried him to the window, in spite of his frantic efforts to escape. When they reached the window, Mounteagle with one hand threw it up to the fullest extent, and then, lifting Matthews with apparently as little exertion as if he had been a cat, held him over the

sill as though about to throw him out. I was frightened then, and was just stepping up to intercede for the culprit, who, whatever his impudence, certainly did not deserve to have his bones broken, which would surely have been the result of a fall from that height, when Munteagle lifted him in again, and setting him on his feet before him, said : ‘You were near coming to grief then, Mr. Matthews. Once for all, let me warn you. I am rather hot-tempered, and, as you see, though lazy, can exert myself when roused ; besides, I don’t think I am quite as green as I look. And now that we understand each other better, I hope we shall soon be good friends. If you want the Major’s chair’—this he said with a slight smile—‘I shall be most happy to give it up to you ; only, you must understand, I am a curious person, and always use any seat I find unoccupied, without asking to whom it belongs, and only yield it to you now to oblige you, and not because I mind either Major or Captains in the matter.’ Matthews, of course, declined the seat of honour, saying he would not deprive him of it ; on which Munteagle begged him not to be too bashful, as he was going to his rooms ;

whereupon little M. took the chair, and the matter terminated."

"A very pretty affair indeed, I must say!" interrupted Captain Morton, "and a rather troublesome youngker he seems to be. I say, Slingsby, don't you teach him any of your tricks, or between the two of you the place will be unbearable."

"Do you know, I was just thinking he would help me to carry out one or two plans I had formed lately, and couldn't execute for want of a congenial spirit to work with," replied Slingsby. "See if I don't sell some of you nicely soon! I'd like to take a rise out of old Armstrong, if it could be managed."

"Take my advice, and leave Mounteagle alone," said Matthews, looking graver than usual. "My word, there's something wrong with that young fellow; he has lots of good in him, but for all that he'll go to the bad, I'm greatly afraid. He looks as if he had some trouble that will drive him into mischief, to get rid of thought."

"It's a woman, then, that's at the bottom of it, I'd bet any money," returned Slingsby. "By Jove! she must be rather a hard-hearted

female if she's unkind to him, for he's a splendid-looking fellow, and no mistake. I wonder does his tailor dress him for nothing? He has the best figure for showing off clothes I've seen for some time—I wish mine was like it," concluded the young fellow, with a sigh; for to have a good figure was his pet ambition, and there was not the least probability of its ever being realised.

When the new-comer appeared at mess that day, the unanimous decision was that he was very good style, and a fine-looking young man into the bargain. "But a precious dare-devil, I should think, too," added Captain Morton; "and I can quite believe that, as he said, he cares for neither Captains nor Major."

Poor young Mounteagle! he was rather to be pitied than envied; but then his comrades didn't know that—they only knew that he was an orphan, with about three hundred a year, besides his pay, and that, joined to his handsome face and figure, they didn't think a bad stock-in-trade to begin with.

"That fellow Mount might get an heiress any day," young Slingsby was wont to remark, with a reckless disregard to the fact that heir-

esses are not as plentiful as blackberries in the society of small country towns—if, indeed, anywhere. And then the little Ensign would look at himself reflectively in the glass, and think that Fortune was a confoundedly partial jade, when she bestowed good looks so lavishly on some, and cut off others with such very short measure.

The fact is, Slingsby did not give himself credit for the attractions he really possessed. Not that he was one whit less vain than most of his kind, but while he sighed for physical beauty, and studied each insignificant feature with a firm conviction it was not so bad after all, he quite forgot to plume himself on his lively wit, his good-nature, his harum-scarum wildness, and the general good expression of his otherwise plain face.

These qualifications, however, were the real reasons for his popularity, not only amongst his brother-officers, but also with the ladies, who always enjoyed a dance or a *tête-à-tête* with “that poor dear darling little Mr. Slingsby” more than with any one else. He knew that he was liked, but not knowing the extent of this liking, and thinking that his looks had

more to do in the matter than was really the case, he experienced several twinges of incipient jealousy at the thought of the ease with which the good-looking stranger would cut him out.

He might have spared himself all uneasiness on the subject, however; for, as time rolled on, it became generally observed that young Mounteagle had the greatest possible aversion for ladies' society, and always spoke bitterly against them, whenever female shortcomings and misdemeanours were the subject of conversation; from which it was argued that Slingsby had not been far wrong when he stated, on the day of the new subaltern's first appearance at B——, that a woman was at the bottom of his melancholy look, so different from that of all his young companions.

But even Matthews, though in general A1 at finding out secrets, failed in his efforts to worm out this; and, cool hand though he was, there was something about Mounteagle's face that made him think twice before venturing to question him on the subject, a mode of proceeding he was quite capable of putting into execution with anyone else. No one could find fault with him for that peculiarity, however, as he

took good care to keep everyone well posted up in all his own affairs—even telling them the particulars of his last flirtation, how near he had been to popping the question, what had prevented him, and so on.

He was a dreadfully wild young man, Mount-eagle, there was no doubt about that—going to the bad *au grand galop*, as Morton had predicted he would, turning the regiment topsyturvy, and doing an infinity of mischief amongst the other young men of his own age and standing; nay, more—by force of character, and, for one of his disposition, a dangerous talent for command, exercising a very pernicious influence over those many years his seniors.

Among the Captains, Morton, as gallant and daring a spirit as he, but looking at life from a very different point of view, and a few others, who still followed their old leader, Morton, in preference to the new one, alone resisted his power; so that the whole of that detachment was divided into two rival factions; those that held for the good being, as is always the case, infinitely the weaker party of the two.

This state of things could not continue. Morton, attracted by a kindred spirit, had con-

ceived a liking for the young fellow, and felt truly grieved to see so noble a mind bending all its energies to the promotion of evil in every shape and form. At first his Captain tried to draw him towards a better life, seeking his company, and exerting his influence, both by precept and example, to that end. But Mount-eagle, though liking his senior warmly, and fully appreciating his disinterested friendship, was still drawn, by some hidden power, deeper and deeper into wrong-doing, and that, too, when he despised the very sins he committed.

Kind and clever as Morton was, he didn't understand the young man, being quite in the dark about his former history; and becoming nettled and annoyed that, after the most earnest conversation with him, and after concurring heartily in all Morton's strictures on breach of discipline, disregard of authority, drinking, gambling, and such like evil ways, he should, half-an-hour after, commit a yet more flagrant offence than any preceding one, the Captain finally let him drop, in not unnatural disgust; stigmatizing him, in spite of his many noble and dazzling qualities, as an irreclaimable young ruffian.




The subaltern felt the change, and, though he had made no apparent effort to keep the proffered friendship, it stung him that it should be withdrawn. He was quite capable of appreciating the great beauty of Morton's character; the fame of his daring deeds had reached him, even before he had joined the regiment; and besides, he could not help seeing that, though his *clientèle* was the most numerous, yet the Captain's followers were the *élite* of the corps; whilst his were nothing at all, if they were not unmitigatedly bad.

Convinced of this, and determined, if he could not keep Morton's esteem, at least to wound his feelings, the young fellow went from bad to worse. He was knowing enough to keep just within the boundary that separates the subordination required by the letter of the law from open revolt; but even within this line he was able, by ingenuity and daring, to make life sufficiently disagreeable to all those who were not his allies.

Thus things went on for a time. Mounteagle didn't drink himself, but he encouraged drinking in others, and assisted at the wildest scenes with a spirit and wit that enhanced the pleas-

ure tenfold, even to those who found evil-doing in itself sufficient enjoyment, without the need of any additional inducement; and by his example numbers were drawn to find amusement in places which, until his arrival, they had never dreamed of frequenting.

Major Campbell was away on leave, together with several of the other officers, leaving Captain Morton at that time in command, sorely puzzled what to do. He had an idea that many men, noted for wildness in early youth, settled down and became active, useful members of society in after-life; whilst, if met with severity, and thrust out hastily from their profession, they would very probably go to the dogs altogether. He felt he should be very sorry were he the means of driving this youngster to destruction; yet it was imperative on him to take some active measures, as matters were going from bad to worse, and there was no time to be lost. Gambling in all forms had sprung up under the auspices of this reckless subaltern, who played all games with a disregard to all known rules connected with them, which at first caused a fear among his followers that he would presently be cleaned out; and then, their



leader being done up, they might have to abandon the pleasant evil life he had introduced. But, as is often the case, the young man, caring nothing for Fortune, was favoured by her ; he gained enormously, whilst some poor weak Ensigns, unable to resist the Circean fascination, found themselves brought to utter ruin.

The meetings for gambling purposes were generally held in Mounteagle's rooms, and for a long time were carried on, if not with secrecy, at least without their real extent and character being discovered. Accident brought under Morton's notice the dreadful lengths to which this most destructive vice was being carried, and he determined on taking measures that should put an end to proceedings at the same time disgraceful to the regiment and detrimental to the service.

He became acquainted with the state of affairs in this manner. Slingsby, though a thoroughly hair-brained, harum-scarum young fellow, was essentially a gentleman ; and being a staunch upholder of Morton, viewed the new order of things with unmitigated disgust. About five months or so, therefore, after Mounteagle

joined, Slingsby came to the Captain one day, and, after condoling with him on the difficulties of the position, and joining with him in hearty wishes that the Major would return immediately to set matters right with a strong hand, he continued :

“And I say, Morton, I wish you would go and see young Royston, to find out what is the matter with him. He has altered so much lately, I am afraid he will come to a bad end. He shuns the sight of everyone, except at night, when he joins that bad set in Mount-eagle’s rooms, and his face is changed and haggard. It was a bad day for him, and many more, when that dare-devil fellow joined the regiment, though so many of us took quite a fancy to him at first sight.”

“Well, I’ll go and call at Royston’s quarters now, if you think I can be of any use; though most of that set are so hardened, nothing we could say would convince them of the folly and mischief of their ways. But he may be different; he used to be a good, weak-minded kind of fellow, always much too easily led.”

So saying, Morton caught up his cap, and walked off with Slingsby, who, however, left

immediately, that the Captain might make his appearance in Royston's rooms alone. After knocking at the door once or twice without getting an answer, Morton opened it and walked in, half expecting to find the owner of the rooms absent. It was not so, however; he was sitting by the table, his arms crossed on his desk, and his head resting on them; a half-written letter lay on the table beside him. He did not seem to notice Morton's entrance, and never looked up until he was touched on the shoulder, and the Captain's kind, cheery voice exclaimed:

"Hulloa! Royston, won't you speak to me? I came in for a quiet chat with you; it's so long since we've had a word together."

He started then, and looking up, disclosed such a fearfully haggard, misery-stricken face that his visitor hardly suppressed an exclamation of horrified wonder. The hand the wretched young man held out to him shook like that of a person in ague, whilst his whole appearance and manner was so desperate and woebegone that Morton was indeed glad he had come. At once seeing clearly that any help rendered in this case must be given immediately, if intended to be of use, he took

a chair, though Royston, either because he was too absorbed in his misery, or because he did not wish his Captain to stay, made no attempt to offer him one. Gradually, partly by kind, sympathetic words, partly by skilful questioning, partly by offers of such help as he needed, Morton drew the whole story of his trouble from the unfortunate subaltern.

It was briefly this: he had been drawn into play in Mounteagle's rooms; at first only risking small sums, then venturing more and more, till at last losing he became desperate, and with the hope of retrieving his losses, he staked sums far larger than he possessed, or had any means of raising. His parents were poor, struggling people, without any way of assisting him, even if he dared apply to them, which he did not; and the only resource left to him was to put himself into the hands of the money-lenders. Only the night before, he confessed to Morton, he had lost £200, betting on the play at *écarté* between Mounteagle and young Denham; backing Denham's skill against Mount's luck, and losing his £200 almost before he had time to think over his folly in staking what he could never pay.

"I must sell out now," he continued; "pay what I owe, and for the rest of my life be, I suppose, a vagabond, without fixed means of support. Oh! that cursed play!—what would I not give that I had never been drawn into its meshes!"


Morton was not a rich man, but he was not an extravagant one, and in a cause like this, if he saw hope of ultimate good resulting from it, he would never scruple to deny himself a few pleasures and indulgences, when, by so doing, he could supply the needful funds to a distressed friend. Therefore, after a few minutes' consideration, he determined to lend this poor young fellow enough to set him all right again, the only condition attaching to the loan, which was to be repaid at convenience, being that he should never go near a gaming-table again.

"It is only by keeping well away from the temptation, Royston, that you will be able to resist it. And," he added, mentally, "I'll take good care no one shall have an opportunity again of yielding to that fascination here whilst I'm with the regiment. That young fellow Mounteagle must go; there seems to be no hope of reforming him, and he will ruin the others,

body and soul, if he remains." Then he continued, aloud, "You shall have the money to-day, and pay it before night, for I shall come down on those fellows this evening. Don't you be there ; I won't let them know it was through you I heard about it."

Very thankfully the wretched young man acceded to these conditions. Always a pitifully weak, vacillating character, he was now in so deplorable a state of mind as to be hardly conscious of the difference between right and wrong ; and even whilst saving him, Captain Morton could not but look with contempt on his feeble, insignificant nature.

"What a milk and water being it is!" he mused, as he telegraphed to London for the money he wanted, and then turned away, to meditate on the course of action he should pursue with Mounteagle that evening. "Even if I hadn't known about those gambling-parties before, if I had questioned him on the subject, I do believe I'd have got it all out of him. But what fools they are, or how very safe they think themselves, when they take no precautions to conceal what they're about. It's the talk of the town, and that fellow Mounteagle must know that it is so."



CHAPTER V.

CAPTAIN MORTON was much perplexed and pre-occupied all the rest of that day. It was quite evident to him this gambling ought to be stopped before it went any further, and did any more mischief; and yet he felt an awkwardness in entering Mouteagle's rooms uninvited, reprimanding him, breaking up his party, and placing the amusement in which they were engaged under prohibition; the more so that he often indulged in play himself, in a mild form, and then found no evil in it. It was the abuse of the thing he objected to; but how to make these fellows see that, or how to draw a line at which to stop natures more unruly and less self-controlled than his own, was the difficulty. Very fervently did he wish Major Campbell had returned. It is so much easier, when you know a disagreeable job has to be performed, to point

out to another that he is the person to act; one can be so strong then in urging the claims of duty that require the dirty work to be done, and one can escape soiling one's own fingers completely.

This struck Morton, after he had exclaimed, perhaps for the twentieth time in the course of an hour, "How I wish Campbell was here!" And he felt perhaps a little ashamed of himself for having been so anxious that a course of action which he saw must make whoever carried it out and adopted it unpopular, should be thrown on another man's shoulders. After all, though the black sheep of the lot would execrate him, no doubt, and do him what mischief it lay in their power to do, all the best and most likeable men in the regiment would be very glad to have order restored, and the destructive vices at present gaining ground among them put down with a strong hand.

"I shall deserve well of the regiment, in spite of the odium I must incur. Whether I get my deserts or not is another question," said the Captain, shaking himself out of his reverie with a smile, and preparing to sally out on his troublesome errand; for he had been moping in

his room, and it was now ten o'clock—time that he should be stirring, as he doubted not they were hard at it at that moment. He had an idea he might find it difficult to obtain admittance to Mounteagle's rooms, and in that case he was resolved to force his way in. The servant, a soldier himself, would be unable to refuse entrance to the Captain, calling in his character of superior officer. Even after he had arranged all preliminary steps in his mind, and had told himself it was quite time to go, he dawdled unaccountably about his rooms. It was such a disagreeable piece of work, and he would so willingly have got off doing it, that he could not bring himself to act quickly and promptly, as he would in any ordinary emergency. It was near eleven when he presented himself at Mounteagle's door, and knocked. It was opened, as he had expected, by the soldier-servant, who, however, held it only ajar, and stood before the opening."

"Come, man, open the door and let me in, I want to see Mr. Mounteagle," said the Captain, impatiently giving the door a push as he spoke.

"Very sorry, sir," answered the servant,

putting his foot against it, and apparently not recognizing the visitor. "Mr. Mouteagle's orders was that no one was to be admitted who didn't give a countersign. I'll let you in, and welcome, when you give me the password."

"Stupid, don't you see I'm Captain Morton, and I want to see Mr. Mouteagle on regimental business. If you can't see me with that door so much closed, open it and look at me, to satisfy yourself, but let me in you must."

Cautiously the man opened the door, and let the light from a lamp on the table fall on the Captain's face. The room was untenanted, but a very comfortable-looking supper was laid out in it, and from the further apartment sounds of voices and laughter faintly penetrated. Satisfied by his inspection, the servant, again shutting him out, said respectfully,

"The orders was strict, Captain, that nobody was to be let in; but if you'll wait a minute, I'll let Mr. Mouteagle know you are here."

So saying, he tried to close the door in Morton's face; but he, pushing it open, answered,

"I wish to see Mr. Mouteagle in there, and I am going in at once. You will please to stand aside and let me pass."

Frightened by Morton's stern brow and determined voice, the soldier stood back, saluting, whilst the Captain entered, and knocked a thundering knock at the inner room. Such a loud, angry-sounding summons was evidently unusual, for a sudden silence fell for a minute on the noisy party inside, then the buzz of voices rose again, some one moved from the table, the door was thrown wide open, a voice from among the revellers crying, "Enter the Great Mogul!"

If it had been the Great Mogul himself, his entrance would hardly have created as much astonishment and consternation as this sudden appearance of their upright and uncompromising Captain, who quietly shut the door behind him, and then placing his back against it, surveyed the scene for a minute or two in silence. They were seated round a table, covered, according to immemorial usage, with the well-known and far-famed green cloth, and, until Morton's entrance suspended their amusement, were deep in the absorbing risks of their game. Now they sat mute and crestfallen for the most part, holding their cards as though they would say those miserable bits of pasteboard had come

there by accident, and glancing, with quick, restless looks, from their unabashed ringleader to the dark face of the intruder. As to Mount-eagle, though for a few minutes too astonished to speak, he was, to all appearance, not at all alarmed, and quickly recovering his self-possession, was the first to break the silence, by politely motioning Morton to a chair, and inviting him to take a hand with them.

For a moment the Captain was almost staggered by the cool assurance of this proposal; but after a minute, mastering his indignation with a powerful effort, he stepped forward, and laying his hand kindly, but firmly, on Mount-eagle's shoulder, looked the young man full in the face, as he said—

“I am sure, if you were aware of the mischief this causes, you would not encourage it. These young fellows, you must know, are ill able in any case to afford losses such as gambling must entail on them, and in many instances the misery and utter ruin that result from such a pursuit is incalculable, and such as, I am sure, you would be grieved to be the means of bringing upon any of your comrades. Take my advice, Mount, do what is both kind towards

them and manly in yourself; tell them you have found out the danger into which you were leading them, and that you will no longer countenance a vice that must cause an infinity of evil, if persisted in."

Morton's stern face softened and lighted up as he thus urged the cause he had come to maintain, and tried to persuade his subaltern to correct his mistake willingly, before he was forced to do so; but Mounteagle, though he for a moment, as he met the kindly look in his Captain's face, felt half ashamed of himself for persisting in a course which he knew this man condemned, and about which his heart told him his adviser spoke the truth, hardened himself against his senior's kindly-spoken words, and shaking off the hand laid on his shoulder with an impatient gesture, picked up a pack of cards that lay before him, and saying, as he did so, "It's my deal—let us go on," proceeded to deal them out to the astonished subalterns, only just beginning to recover from their amazement.


But he had hardly understood either Morton's errand there or his character; and when the Captain, laying his hand on the hand that held the pack, said quietly, but impressively, "I

tried to persuade you to give this up of your own free will; as you won't do that, I forbid it," he shook off the detaining hand as though it had been a viper, and exclaimed passionately,

"Take care, Captain Morton! Who asked you to come in here, with your cursed interference, I should like to know? I will neither be dictated to nor touched by you. Leave the room this instant, sir!"

"Not until I have first seen these out before me," answered the Captain firmly, indicating by a look the cards lying on the table, and the young men seated around it. "I am sorry you should have forced me to interfere, but I know my duty, and at any cost will carry it out. Leave the room, gentlemen," he continued, authoritatively. "I do not wish to report this to the Colonel, but I shall be obliged to do so, unless my orders are at once obeyed. Howard and Carruthers," he continued, seeing the two named appeared the most frightened of the lot, "do you set a good example, and leave at once; you can gain nothing by staying, and may get into a row. Let me see you make a move."

Mechanically the two young men named



rose. They were ensigns, not very long joined, unoffending, peaceable lads, of the milk-and-water order, if left to themselves, but that were going to the dogs as quick as possible, under the influence Mounteagle exercised over them. Now, as they made a movement to obey their Captain, Mounteagle's glance fell on them. The sight of their defection rendered him furious; it was evident, if he would retain his empire over them and those around, he must take some course now that would raise him at once and for ever in their minds to a height from which neither Captains nor Colonel should ever after displace him. He would try which was the best man, he or this upsetting senior, who would come poking into affairs that didn't concern him, and who deserved a good setting down for his pains. It would decide for the future which side had the moral ascendancy over the other, which character was the strongest and most influential. Springing to his feet, therefore, he shouted to the two young men, who were already near the door—

“Stay you two! Do you think I will let my guests be treated thus? He who quits this room till I give leave is no friend of mine.”

Then, turning to Morton, he added—"I am sorry you should force me to say it, but you are not wanted here—do not oblige me to put you out?"

"You have heard the conditions on which I go," answered the Captain. "Why do you make this scene?—it is very prejudicial to you in the eyes of all lookers-on; and if you still persist in refusing to do as I desire, I shall be obliged to report you."

Whilst Morton spoke, Mouteagle, glancing round the table, perceived two of his associates betting which would get the best of it, he or the Captain. One of them was decidedly upholding the latter, adding what Mouteagle took to be some disparaging remark on his, Mount's, strength of will. Maddened by the idea that his comrades were laughing at him, and catching at the last part of his senior's sentence, he replied, "Report that too," at the same time striking Morton a back-handed blow on the mouth.

This was too much; for a long time the Captain had with difficulty kept his temper under control, now it blazed forth, breaking bounds suddenly, as he seized Mouteagle by the

throat, and after shaking the young man's tall, powerful figure for a moment, as though it had been a reed, threw him from him against the opposite wall, saying, as he recovered his self-control,

"You are not worth my giving you a thrashing, or I'd do it!"

As Mounteagle fell heavily to the ground, the other young men gathered threateningly round Morton, with cries of "Toss him out of the window!"—"Kick him downstairs!" &c.; but the Captain, placing his back against the wall, fronted them with so calm and determined an aspect, seeming, at the same time, so thoroughly prepared to act on the defensive, if required, that the clamorous ring around him confined themselves to making an outcry, and using violent language, until their ringleader, slowly gathering himself up, appeared again in their midst.

"Leave me to deal with Captain Morton," he said, addressing his companions. Then, turning to the Captain, he continued, "Will you leave this, or will you force me to throw you neck and crop out of the window; for by Heaven! I'll stand this no longer, and will

soon see which is best man of us two!"

For a moment Morton was inclined to accept the challenge, and though his subaltern was by far the larger man, yet he felt little misgiving as to the result being in his favour. His temper was cool and even; besides, he had the right on his side. But a minute's reflection convinced him that such a brawl would weaken his cause, and make his conduct appear in an unfavourable light to his superiors. With an effort he controlled himself, and answered,

"Such a disturbance as that would cause, would be almost as mischievous in its effects as the vice I came to put down. I shall not therefore continue this dispute with you, Mount-eagle, but will leave you time to think calmly over what has occurred. If you do not, after reflection, consider you owe me an apology, and promise to amend your ways in the future, I shall report the whole affair; and I need scarcely tell you the blow you inflicted on your superior officer, when engaged in the fulfilment of his duty, will, without doubt, lead to your expulsion from the Army. I should be sorry for such a result, and give you time to think the matter over, that you may adopt the only


course which can save you from such a fate. As to the others, they have been led away by your example; I should be grieved to get them into trouble, and would advise them to go to their quarters at once, as, if I find them still in-subordinate, I shall be obliged to take severe notice of the occurrence."

When he finished speaking, Captain Morton turned to the door and went out, dead silence reigning throughout the room he left, each man looking at the other, longing, and yet afraid, to take the Captain's advice. Presently Howard, one of the young men to whom Morton had spoken, moved towards the door; as he touched the handle, Mouteagle raised his head, and said,

"You're right, Howard—though you're a precious sneak too; but every one must look out for himself now, I suppose, as we've got this fellow down on us, and the faster you all clear out the better it will be for you. I shall be broke, I suppose. What a pity it was I didn't give him something to carry about with him for a good while, instead of that tip he thought so much of. It would have been all the same in the end; and, at any rate, I should

have had the satisfaction of thinking I was leaving the service for something."

Glad of the permission to leave, they all slipped out quietly, without casting a glance on the inviting supper-table in the outer room. Things were looking far too black for all of them, to permit any among the number having a good appetite; and even the inducement of talking over the row could not keep them together, so fearful were they of not being soon enough in their own quarters to win Morton's approval. When they were all gone, and he was left sitting alone by the deserted card-table, under the brilliant gaslight, Mounteagle thought it over. "He wasn't far wrong after all," he confessed to himself, "though I couldn't say so before those fellows. I know many of the lot are well cleaned out—more fools they to go on playing. Why should I, or anyone else, take care of people that can't take care of themselves? After all, I suppose it is hard on a beggar of that sort, when one fine morning he wakes up to find every stiver he has in the world gone, and that he's in debt for a lot more besides that he must pay, or else cut the concern altogether. There's that fool Royston



—I wonder where he got the two hundred pounds he paid to-day? I didn't think he could raise so much in the world—it is no wonder he has determined not to come here any more. They're a sneaking set, my friends, I must say; and Morton's worth the whole lot put together—he's a plucky fellow, to give him his due. How boldly he faced them all that time, when they would have liked to set on him; and he's not a bad sort either—he doesn't want to kick a fellow out—he said if I apologised, he would take no notice of that blow. I know I oughtn't to have done it, and that I deserve anything I get; but then can I bring myself to ask his pardon? That's the rub. It must be done, I suppose, or else I leave the service, and that I don't want to do; but I'll never succeed in eating humble pie properly. However, I don't think he'll be hard on me. I know he's a generous fellow, so I'll sleep on the matter to-night, and to-morrow I'll see what I can do in the penitent line."

Satisfied with this resolve, Mounteagle sat down to read, an occupation he but rarely indulged in, particularly at such an hour, when generally he was far otherwise employed; but

to-night his enforced loneliness, and the disagreeable thoughts that would intrude themselves, made any occupation acceptable. In the meanwhile, Morton returned to his own rooms, lit a cigar, and, leaning out of the window, passed the events just related in review through his mind. It was a balmy, autumnal evening, the air was soft and warm, the heaven was bright with stars, but these soothing influences were lost upon the Captain, whose mind was in a whirl of excitement and indignation. "It was too bad," he thought, "that this man, to whom he had really been lenient, for whom he had even once felt a liking, should have treated him in such an outrageous manner. Surely he was right to stop the gambling—that anyone must acknowledge; and he certainly thought he had gone about an unpleasant business in the most inoffensive and unobtrusive manner possible. He could not understand that young man—there must be a warp in his mind somewhere, that prevented him seeing kindness when it was intended, and urged him on to such outrageous outbreaks of passion and temper as the one Morton had just witnessed. One thing, however, he was glad

to see—all the young men were leaving Mount-eagle's rooms, and dispersing quietly to their own quarters—he could distinguish their dark forms passing silently across the square; and he could not forbear a smile as he noticed how little talking or excitement there was amongst them.

“So far so good,” he thought. “I fancy those fellows will keep quiet for a while. If only Mount would apologise, all would be well yet; if he shows any inclination to do so, I'll help him out as well as I can. I have no wish to do him any harm, and suppose it would be utter ruin to such as he if he were turned out of the service. Yes, the Major may come home now as soon as he likes, and I hope he mayn't be away much longer; but I think he'll find everything straight and comfortable on his return.”

Thus musing, Morton finished his cigar, drew in his head and turned in, more hopeful as to the result of his night's work than he had any right to be, all things considered; but then, if he had not much faith in the good part of Mount's nature, at any rate he had great faith in self-interest, believing his turbulent subaltern would

be as much under its influence as anyone else in this self-seeking world of ours ; and perhaps, after all, he was not far wrong.

"An abominable drizzly day!" thought Morton, as he glanced from his paper to the window next morning at breakfast. "I don't fancy Mount will trouble himself to walk out on an unpleasant errand, such as the one before him. Well, I'll give him to-day to think over it, and then, if I hear nothing, I may conclude he has chosen the other alternative."

Hardly had these thoughts passed through his mind, when a knock was heard at the door.

"Come in!" shouted Morton, little expecting who his visitor would be, and fairly jumping out of his seat with astonishment when Mount-eagle entered the room, looking awkward and embarrassed.

Before Morton could speak, and without waiting to take the seat handed to him, Mount-eagle began, as if repeating a lesson :

"I came to apologise to you, Captain Morton, for my behaviour last night, and more particularly for having struck you. I also wish to thank you for having given me a little time for

consideration before making mention of my conduct to the Colonel—conduct which I trust I shall never repeat, and of which I am now heartily ashamed.”

“Say no more, I beg,” interrupted Morton. “I see you are sorry for what passed last night; let us forget it. I might, perhaps, have managed better; so think no more about it. And now sit down and have some breakfast with me.”

“You’re a better fellow than I ever thought you were,” answered Mouteagle, earnestly. “You set about your business yesterday evening with the utmost kindness and consideration for me; but I was such an ass, all your care was thrown away. The fact is, Morton, the world and I are at odds. You must have noticed what an uncertain fellow I am—one day doing a little good, and getting on steadily, the next doing something so outrageously bad that it gets me an evil reputation with all the men worth knowing in the regiment. But you don’t know the cause of all this; you don’t know how hard life has been to me. You cannot tell what it is to a bold, high-spirited lad as I was, to have a mother whom I idolised, but whom I

could not revere; a father who loved me, but had wronged me; family ties all upset and at variance, what would be right to others being wrong to me, looked down upon by those whose esteem I coveted, looked up to by those I despised. That was my early life, Morton—not a good school, you may imagine; a very evil one for such a lad as I, I can assure you.”

“I don’t understand the case you describe,” answered Morton; “at least, I cannot imagine what causes could lead to such a state of things; but I can quite fancy that the life you picture must have been hard and heart-breaking. Don’t let it spoil your future, though. You are free from early associations now; forget them, and live them down. At your age such things are easily forgotten; a happy and successful life may lie before you, if you keep up your courage, and determine that evil shall not conquer, because in times past you suffered by it, and through it.”

“A happy life in the future,” repeated the young man. “Yes, it is not so very long ago since I believed in that; but I found out my mistake there also—a woman taught me the folly of that idea,” he added gloomily.

"A woman! Oh, nonsense!" said Captain Morton, rather unsympathetically. To tell the truth, he was inclined to laugh at a young fellow of one-and-twenty assuming the wronged and broken-hearted lover. "Why, lad, at your age no woman can teach you that. You think you've been in love once, and you fancy that love is to be eternal. In the next ten years, you will have thought yourself in love at the very least twenty times more, and very probably not one of them will be the real thing. After that age, beware how you take such an idea into your head, for then it will be likely to stick there, and if it has to be rooted out, will cost you sorrow, no doubt. But at present—why, the idea is ridiculous!"

"I daresay you think so," answered Mount-eagle, "and I was foolish, no doubt, to mention the matter to you; but, for all that, it is not so absurd a fancy as you imagine. In the first place, there are few women in the world more beautiful, and she is as clever as beautiful, which with me goes a great way, as she would have no power to wound so deeply if her looks were her only attraction. And then she has treated me badly; and, if I lose all the good of

my life for it, I will be revenged! She might have faded out of my memory but for the wrong she did me—that I shall never forgive, never forget!”

“Then it is to be revenged on her, and not for love of her, that you intend to spoil your life? That’s folly indeed, boy. If she has behaved as you say, your blighted life will never cause her a moment’s pain. I thought your grief was because you couldn’t marry her.”

“Ah! but I will marry her, if I get a chance,” repeated the young man; “then I shall forgive her, and think no more of vengeance; but if I don’t win her, I will wound her some way or other—she shall feel that the man she slighted had power in him that might have made him famous, had she helped him with her love. All this it is, Morton, that has set me at cross purposes with life, till I cannot help going astray, that, in the excitement and tumult I raise, I may find for a short time oblivion from the troubles and cares that haunt me.”

“I don’t pretend to understand it, Mount,” replied Morton, thoughtfully. “I have been in love, or thought myself so, many a time, but I never saw the woman yet that was worth a

brave man's breaking his heart or spoiling his life for—any more, indeed, than I believe there exists a man worth causing the same grief to a true-hearted woman.”

“That’s because you know nothing about the real thing; but I tell you there’s many a time when I shouldn’t have the heart to live, but that I’m afraid of the other thing, and what’s to come after.”

“Well, I may be an old fool, and you may know much more about the matter than I do,” answered the Captain, “but it seems to me that, while there is work in the world to do, and while there are honour, respect, and love to be gained by doing one’s duty in it, the game is not all up; and besides, if the woman you loved and lost is worth loving, is it not well to raise yourself in her eyes, instead of lowering your whole nature by conduct that must only confirm her in the belief she had done right, and make her think, if she thinks of you at all, ‘What an escape I had!’ Don’t give in to that idea that your happiness is done for because your first fancy has not been successful; there are many you will like as well during life—I think, one you will like better;

but, of course, you can't see that yet. Try and shake off the feeling about it, and don't let any woman that ever lived drive you into a way of living that dishonours your character."

"I daresay there is reason in some of what you say," the subaltern replied, gloomily; "and, at any rate, because you've been so kind to me, I'll try and not give you so much trouble in future. I owe you something for not having reported my conduct, and if I can keep myself in bounds at all, I will; but you mustn't expect too much, for I'm an unruly customer, and self-restraint is strange to me."

"An unruly customer truly," thought Morton, when the door had closed behind his early visitor. "Who'd have thought he'd have behaved so well, though, about that apology? There's good in him, and it's a pity a boyish love-story should send him to the bad. Such humbug, too! No doubt it's some girl that he'd not look at, if he saw her a short time hence, and that, very likely, would be glad enough to hook him, if she could get him in a few years."

How far the Captain's ideas on love-affairs were generally correct, it is not for us to say, but even he might in time modify his views;

and certainly the fancy portrait he drew of the young lady who had captivated Herbert Mount-eagle's imagination was as unlike the real Ethel Courtenay, both in appearance and manners, as could well be conceived.

A few days after the incidents just related, Major Campbell returned. He was a stiff, precise old Scotchman, a martinet in matters of drill and regimental etiquette, stern, unbending, and prejudiced.

As he entered barracks, he met Mounteagle driving a tandem out of the square. The turn-out was a dashing one, but it did not meet the Major's views as to what a turn-out should be; he denounced it on the spot as a neck-breaking, new-fangled invention. "Just a tempting of Providence, man," he added, addressing Morton, who was with him. "What's the young scamp's name?—I haven't seen him before."

"He joined after you left; his name's Herbert—Mounteagle. He's a fine fellow, in spite of the tandem, which isn't a bad thing, to my mind, Major, though it might be safer if the leader didn't happen to be a hunter that has never been driven in that style before."

"Well, if he does break his neck, he'll be no

loss, I think," said the Major, "for he's a hare-brained-looking fellow, and, I doubt, knocks up many a row in barracks. I don't think I shall allow that tandem into the square, however, for he might do mischief with it, even if he didn't break his neck; besides, it's extravagant putting two horses in a light trap like that, and extravagance is the first gate on the road to hell, as, ye know, I've often told you, Morton, so I consider it's my duty to put down anything like it among the subalterns under my charge. I'll speak to him about it, and see if I can persuade him to give it up."

"Poor Mounteagle!" mused Morton, "he'll catch it from this old screw. I hope he'll be able to bear it, and not kick over the traces; but I'm inclined to think severity will do him no good, and really, though he has done better lately, he's trying enough occasionally."

It is to be presumed that the team got on better than either Morton or Major Campbell had expected, for, about two hours afterwards, as the last-named gentleman was going out for a quiet constitutional ride, they came rattling back into the square, well in hand, rounding the corner in dashing style, and narrowly es-

caping upsetting the Major and his heavy under-bred roan cob. That animal, with the touch of temper inherent in his under-bred, currish nature, put up his back with a squeal, kicking with delight at the unusual commotion. The immediate result of this playful ebullition was that the Major measured his length on the ground, was almost grazed by the wheels of the trap as it rattled past him, and received a rather severe nip in the shoulder from his amiable steed as he attempted to rise.

Crimson with rage and exertion, he at length picked himself up, in time to observe Mounteagle turn round to look at the fat old beggar he had bowled over, as he observed to Attwood, who was with him. Not having yet met the Major, he had no idea who the individual could be whose career had so nearly been terminated by his dashing turn-out, and Attwood, being near-sighted, could give him no information. If Major Campbell was short in his temper, he decidedly was not so in his sight, and derived his own impressions from the grin that expanded the subaltern's features as he cast a lingering look behind him.

"I'll make that young scoundrel pay for

this!" ejaculated the irascible gentleman, as he climbed, in a laborious manner, suggestive of bruises, on to the roan cob's back, and proceeded on his way, devising various plans by which to punish that misguided young man for his extraordinary conduct.

"Seen the Major, Mounteagle?" asked Morton, who was in the ante-room when the young man entered—"he rode out of the square just about the time you were coming in, I should say. He has taken a wonderful dislike to your team—thinks it's extravagant, dangerous, and what not. He saw you going out before to-day, and then told me his ideas on the subject."

"He was going out when I was coming in, you say? He can't possibly be the old duffer whose horse we frightened, and who was kicked off in consequence! By Jove! if that was he, I've done it, and no mistake! Could it have been he, Morton?"

"A stout, red-faced man about five and forty, on an ill-bred roan cob. Does that description answer for the man you bowled over?"

"To a hair's-breadth! I have put my foot into it this time! I'll pretend not to recognise him when I see him at mess; if he thinks I

don't know who it was, perhaps he won't care to enlighten me, and so will defer his attack on my tandem. One thing I warn him," added the young man, after a pause, with a very dark look on his handsome face, "he had better not meddle with me and my amusements, or he may find that it's easier to raise the devil in Herbert Mounteagle than to lay him again once he's roused."

A statement that Morton could well believe, from all he had seen of his unmanageable subaltern, besides instinctively feeling that he had as yet by no means fathomed the worst depths of the young man's nature.

According to his intention, the Major came into the ante-room next morning, where Mounteagle and several others were looking over the papers. Going up to the young man, he began:

"I have something I wish to speak to you about this morning. Shall I say it now, or would you rather I waited till we are alone?"

"Oh! say it now, by all means," returned Mounteagle, in a nonchalant manner; "a *tête-à-tête* loses a good deal of its charm when both parties are of the same sex, and are perfect strangers. I hope you don't want me to buy

the roan cob I saw you on yesterday, because I don't think I could do that—even to please you."

"Decidedly," thought Morton, as Mounteagle finished his speech, and leant back in his chair with an air and manner evidently meant to be aggravating—"decidedly, if that fellow gets into trouble, he deserves no pity, for he's doing his best to create a row. By Jove, Campbell will choke, I think!"

Indeed, Mounteagle himself, the minute after he had given utterance to his impertinent and imprudent speech, wondered what had possessed him to draw down on himself, in this reckless way, the already-awakened wrath of his commanding-officer. He could not but acknowledge that now Campbell would have cause for anger, and certainly it was not in such a manner that he could ensure a prosperous and easy life in the regiment—such a life as would favour his doing his duty, and filling his place in the world, as Morton had pointed out to him he should do. He glanced at the Captain, who looked grave and uneasy; thence he turned towards the Major, whom surprise and indignation had hitherto held silent, but who now

spoke, divided between rage and his desire to appear dignified and composed.


"You are an impertinent puppy, sir!" he said. "Once and for all, understand that I will not suffer myself to be addressed in such a manner. You will have to learn that a foolish young jackanapes like you is not permitted to address his seniors in the familiar style you have adopted. Remember *that*, in future; and, as you care about remaining in the regiment, avoid indulging in your natural impudence—at least, in my presence."

"Very hard, if it's natural, that I mayn't be permitted to indulge in it," murmured Mount-eagle, loud enough for the Major to hear him.

"No, sir, it's not hard. We want nothing natural in the army; and we won't have it. What would nature do for us, I should like to know? Turn us all into a lot of insubordinate savages, stained with pigments of various colours. No, sir, I have no doubt that state of things would suit you, but for us Nature's day is past, and we won't have her back again; so don't let me hear you excusing any of your impertinences on the score of their being natural. Perhaps you'll tell me it's natural to

drive horses in the senseless and dangerous fashion I saw you doing yesterday?—and about which I was going to speak to you, when your impertinence turned my attention from the subject for a minute. I have to request that you will be more careful in passing people in future; you were very near causing me to meet with a serious accident yesterday—a very serious one, I may say; and, for the sake of others as well as myself, I repeat that I order you to be more careful in future.”

“The roan cob didn’t seem to like it either,” replied Mounteagle, with an easy laugh. “He gave rather a good kick; but you shouldn’t have parted company with him for that. If I could have stopped the team, I would have got down to pick you up; but they were so impatient, you were on your feet before they began to slacken speed. I hope you weren’t hurt, Major Campbell?” This query he put leaning forward, with an extreme expression of respectful interest in his countenance, which aggravated the Major intensely, as he could hardly tax his tormentor with impertinence, when his whole bearing expressed the most earnest solicitude.



"Hold your tongue, sir," he gasped at length; "and don't speak again unless you are addressed."

He glared at the offending subaltern with such dangerous eyes, while speaking, that Mount-eagle deemed, in this instance, discretion the better part of valour, and forbore to provoke him any further—not holding his tongue, or following the Major's orders literally, but turning to his neighbour, and talking to him, with much judgment and discrimination, about the points of a bull-dog he had that day purchased.

Campbell glowered at him for a few minutes, as though strongly disposed to order him again to be silent; but, after a little reflection, he wisely thought better of it. The young man was so evidently impracticable that nothing but extreme measures could reduce him to subjection; and, irritable though the Major was, he retained sufficient command over himself to know that too great severity at first would be productive of as bad effects as too much leniency, if not worse.

The matter was therefore permitted to blow over on that occasion; but Morton noticed that sometimes the two men would eye each other

with a defiant expression that promised little for future goodwill between them.

That night, when Mounteagle turned in, his thoughts reverted to his old sorrows. There had been nothing in his squabble with the Major sufficient to drive sad reminiscences out of his mind, and—what was unusual for him—he had not been out to any place of amusement, or engaged in any scheme mad enough to drown reflection.

“I don’t seem in a fair way of getting on at present,” he mused. “This old beggar whose ill-will I have contrived to provoke will do his best to prevent my getting to the top of the tree quickly. And I had made up my mind I would do so, that I might win thereby—What a fool I am to talk of winning her by fine deeds or fame; a long purse, plenty of money, and leave to spend it, are the means to gain her heart, and those I haven’t got, nor ever will have. What foolish, mad things castles are, and how many lives have they blighted and ruined since first men took to building them! Yes, they nearly did for me, when I gave all my boyish heart to that cold beauty. I might have been so different, had she cared for me; now that

is altered. No more love in a cottage for me, no more striving against self, that the girl I cared for might have a pure, untarnished name. There are finer things going than that romantic moonstruck madness; at least, they are more attainable, and require no self-denial and painful effort to gain them. Power over the weaker herd around, wealth secured no matter how or where, privilege to trample the feeble beings in your way under foot, ability to cringe to the strong, until you, having grown stronger, can rise and crush them—these are the objects I must now have in view. Pitiless and successful shall describe me in years to come, for when I wanted pity I found none to give it me. In future I will ask it from none, grant it to none.”

Thus thinking, with a consciousness of power within him to work out the destiny he traced, Herbert Mounteagle lay down to rest, forgetting entirely the good resolutions so lately made, and the nobler desires with which Morton had so lately inspired him.

CHAPTER VI.

MAJOR CAMPBELL was a Scotchman, we have said—he was also an enthusiastic angler. For the indulgence of this, his favourite pastime, he would go through any amount of fatigue and privation, getting up before daylight, and sallying forth through the dripping grass, and over the slippery rocks that bordered the river near which he was happy enough to find himself quartered, heedless alike of soaked clothes, foretelling rheumatism and lumbago in the future, and of barked shins and bruised body in the present. Even his breakfast, that meal which it is said no Scotchman can dispense with, unless at the risk of seriously shortening his temper, would be neglected for the one all-absorbing object; and though he was not always as successful as might have been desired, still

any want of faith in his skill, or doubts as to his knowledge on the subject, constituted the one mortal offence he could never forgive, and woe to the unlucky subaltern from whom any expression of incredulity on the matter might fall.

There was, about two miles from Banisford, a place called Earlsfort, through which ran the Wey, the same river that formed one of the principal attractions and ornaments of the town. Only in the town the fishing was not good, while down at Earlsfort it was considered remarkably so, by any who were fortunate enough to get the owner's permission to try their skill in the dark shady pools that abounded in the old domain. Major Campbell was one of those who had this good fortune, and, though he was not aware of the fact, Mounteagle was another ; but angling was now too quiet an amusement for his tastes, and therefore one he seldom indulged in. It encouraged thought, a pursuit for which he found he had a great deal too much time already ; and therefore, until the Major's arrival, the Wey had never received any attention from him.

"I am going out to fish to-morrow. Will

you come?" asked Campbell of Morton, at mess, a few evenings after his return.

Mounteagle, who had already been informed of the Major's hobby, looked up and listened.

"I should like to join you very much," answered Morton; "but I have to spend the day with some friends. There's some talk of our leaving this soon, and joining head-quarters, isn't there?"

"Yes, I've heard something about it," replied Campbell, "but I'm sure I hope not. I shouldn't be likely to get fishing so easily elsewhere; besides, I think we shall be sent to Aldershot. But if you won't come, Morton, I'll go by myself, and make an early start. I think I shall drive over. It's no good tiring oneself by walking, before the business of the day comes on."

During this dialogue a quiet smile had passed over Mounteagle's face, but by the time Campbell's eye fell on him, he was grave and uninterested-looking as ever. After mess he caught hold of Slingsby, to ask him if he would come out to drive with him next day.

"I'm rather busy just at present," answered Slingsby; "but if you want me very much I'll

stretch a point to 'oblige you. Where are you going?"

"Hush! don't talk so loud. I'm going to fish at Earlsfort, and I think there will be some fun, so you had better come."

"There'll be a row no doubt, and I think you are very imprudent to provoke his anger in this way; but as you will do it whether or no, I suppose I may as well be amused by it as anyone else. What do you intend to do when you meet him?"

"Do—I shall do nothing. He doesn't know I have got leave to go there as well as himself, and he'll think I'm poaching: I shall keep cool and take my fun out of it. There's no harm in that, you see, so you needn't be afraid of my giving him any hold over me."

The expedition was altogether too much for Slingsby's taste, and the idea of taking a rise out of the Major pleased him too well for him to continue his remonstrances, and they arranged their plans accordingly.

"He'll begin to work at the side of the place nearest this," said Mounteagle, "and he'll go off somewhere about six in the morning. Now that's too much of a good thing—even the fun of

annoying him wouldn't pay me for shivering in the damp at that unearthly hour ; so if you'll come over and breakfast with me at nine, we'll set off about ten, go to the furthest point our fishing extends, and we'll work down stream, while he's working up. In that way we are sure to meet, and then you may look out for squalls."

According to agreement, Slingsby arrived next morning to breakfast. The early rising had given them both a good appetite, perhaps also the meal was a little later than had been intended, and the trap a little earlier, for they had not quite finished when it was heard below.

"What are you driving?" asked Slingsby going to the window, while his host bundled up fishing-rod, fly-book, casting lines, and a various collection of other articles he fancied might be useful: "By Jove! it's the tandem!" And thus speaking, Slingsby clattered down the stairs and took his place in the trap; while the horses, in spite of the utmost exertions of the grooms, pawed and pranced with a lively appreciation of the lightness of their load, and the freshness of the morning air, that would have rejoiced Major Campbell's heart had he seen them, with

the prospect of a smash. After a few highly eccentric manoeuvres, however, they were at last started right, and away spun the trap and its lighthearted occupants, dashing out of the square at a pace that would have given the roan cob fits, could he have seen them.

Their destination was about five miles from barracks, but five and twenty minutes at the pace they were going brought them to the door of a neat farm-house, where Mouteagle proposed to put up his horses. This done, they strolled down to the stream. Mouteagle put his rod together, and Slingsby, who said he preferred doing the agreeable, lay down on a comfortable mossy bank, with his hat well over his eyes, and indulged doubtless in a pleasant and profitable reverie, though his companion was rude enough to say he had been asleep. Acting as if this was the case at any rate, Mouteagle after a time came up and pushed the recumbent form of his comrade; that not producing any immediate signs of life, the angler administered one or two kicks, which had the desired effect, for Slingsby, sitting up, asked him what he meant by disturbing a fellow when he was thinking.

"I'm going further down the stream, to see if I can find this old duffer," answered Mouteagle. "Will you come with me, or wait where you are? You'd better come, if you want to see the fun."

With some reluctance Slingsby rose, and they proceeded on their way, looking about on all sides, under every shady bush, and behind every hillock, but all to no purpose.

"He took no one out with him, did he?" asked Mouteagle; and on Slingsby's answering in the affirmative, he continued, "It isn't possible that he can have fallen into one of the pools and drowned himself?"

"Oh! no, that could never have happened," replied the other. "See, here is his fishing basket, he can't be far off."

Still look as closely as they might, they could perceive him nowhere. The fact of the matter was, that the Major, intent on his fishing, had stumbled against a wasp's nest built in an overhanging tree, the inmates of which swarmed on him, forcing him to take refuge in the deepest water near, to escape being stung to death by them; and he was at that moment crouched up to his neck in the current, under the shade of some

drooping branches, watching the movements of his subalterns with intense interest, whenever he dared raise his head above water, which he only ventured to do when he could no longer hold it under; for he was surrounded by a buzzing busy swarm, that settled on him the minute any portion of his body became visible, and nearly drove him frantic with their stings. He would have shouted and tried to attract the young men's attention, but he was fearful of exposing himself to the attacks of his enemies, and he hoped his friends would see him without his being obliged to incur that risk. Presently Mounteagle exclaimed :

“What an extraordinary buzzing! there must be a whole colony of bees somewhere near. Look there, Slingsby, in that dark pool, do you see crowds of them hovering over the water—they're all trying to settle on something. What is it they have there? By Jove! it is the Major's head. What on earth shall we do? he'll be killed if we leave him there, and we shall be stung to death ourselves if we go near. I tell you what you'll do: run for the trap, put to as quick as possible, and drive to the corner of the road, where it turns by old Bell's house. I'll give

you ten minutes start, and then we'll run to meet you—that's to say, if that poor devil has any run left in him."

No sooner said than done. Slingsby darted away for the trap, and when the ten minutes elapsed, Mounteagle, dragging the Major out of the water, set out for the road, at the best pace the half-drowned man could muster. Mounteagle got badly-stung during the run, but once they got into the dog-cart and drove away, their tiny but malignant enemies were soon distanced, and Slingsby turned his attention to the Major, who lay in a huddled wet heap on the seat beside him. He appeared fearfully stung, and was suffering very much; besides which he was soaked from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, and was quite unable to answer, when asked to relate how this mishap had befallen him.

If they had done the distance fast in the morning, they did it faster then; and great was Morton's surprise when he beheld, from the window of his room, where he was getting ready to go out, the tandem draw up at the Major's door. His astonishment increased ten-fold when he saw him helped to descend, and

assisted into the house, a limp, shapeless mass.

"What can have happened?" he mused. "Can those two have been up to mischief, and accidentally have done more than they intended? It looks like it. And now there's the doctor going in to the Major. I must see what all this means."

It was very soon explained by Slingsby and Mounteagle, at least as far as they knew anything about it; but how the Major had come into collision with the wasps, of course they could only imagine.

"He must have stumbled against one of their nests, in forcing his way through the bushes," said Morton. "Why, Mounteagle, you are badly stung too!"

"Yes, I feel decidedly uncomfortable. When the doctor has done with Campbell, I'll get him to come and give me something. Slingsby got off the best, and even he has not had his appearance improved."

The Major was really laid up after his adventure. Pain and wet brought on a sharp attack of fever, so that three or four weeks elapsed before he showed again at mess, or was brought in contact with his subordinates in any way

connected with regimental duty. He saw them all when they called to inquire after him as he got better, and amongst others he received a visit from Mouteagle. Not that that young gentleman would ever have gone to see him of his own free will. He had made up his mind he had a grievance against Campbell, and the more he felt that the grievance was imaginary, or at most a slight one, the more he was determined not to condone it, or pass it over, even for the sake of self-interest, by showing any anxiety for the Major's welfare. He would praise himself for being no hypocrite, and liked to imagine he played an honourable and manly part by taking no interest in the sick man, whereas he only gave others the idea of his being unforgiving and heartless. No, the reason of his calling was that the Major had sent for him, anxious to express his gratitude for the part Mouteagle had played in rescuing him.

The subaltern went as he was sent for, but not in the best humour with the invalid, who had thus unintentionally broken up a select party Mouteagle had formed, for the express purpose of trying a new bull-dog's powers of rat-catching. "It's rather too bad," he growled, as he left a

message for those invited that he would be back presently. "That man never lets me alone five minutes; when he's not pitching into me he's drowning himself, or stirring up mare's nests, that I have to pull him out of." By which expression it is to be supposed Munteagle meant wasp's nests, and from which it was evident he considered the Major's mishap as an additional grievance against himself.

Arrived at Major Campbell's quarters, the young man, on being admitted, received as hearty a welcome as it was in the old Scotchman's nature to give; but though he was grateful, and wished to show it, he couldn't help being a little chilled by his subaltern's stiff, unresponsive demeanour. After expressing his gratitude for the exertion Munteagle had made in his behalf, Major Campbell asked whether he had obeyed some order which he (the Major) had given him the day before. To his intense and indignant surprise, the young man answered calmly,


"I did not understand what you said in an official light, the subject being so trivial. I merely imagined you were giving me a little good advice, for your own amusement."

"Good heavens, man, are you mad? Do you think it is for you to decide on the sense of the orders you receive? If such are really your ideas, the sooner you leave the service the better, for you are not fit for it, and will live to disgrace it!" cried the Major, in great excitement, and looking at the young man—who was also beginning to warm up a little—with intense astonishment.

"Take care what you say about disgrace, sir," said Mounteagle, getting up quickly. "I don't bear much from you, or any man, so the sooner I get out of this the better. I was foolish to come here; but I could not avoid it, as I was sent for."

The last part of this speech was uttered in an aside, which the speaker intended should be, and which was, according to his intention, perfectly audible. Then, taking up his hat, and bowing stiffly, he hurried from the room.

"What do you think of that?" asked Major Campbell of Morton, after detailing the whole scene next time that officer called. "He's the most ill-conditioned young ruffian I ever met, in all my experience, and I have seen a few



troublesome customers, during twenty-eight years of regimental life."

"I'm afraid there's a bad drop in him somewhere," answered Morton. "Sometimes he does such fine things, and is so pleasant, you can't help liking him, and thinking he's going to turn out well yet; and then, just when your hopes seem about to be realized, and everything is going on well with him, he cuts up rough, shows the cloven foot, and drives all thought of a good ending for him out of your head. Something must have gone very wrong with him in his youth. He hinted as much to me one day, but what it was I have never been able to make out."

"Well, I'll not stand on ceremony with him in future, I know," replied the Major. "I've given him his chance of making it up with me, and, if anything, he treated me worse than before. I suppose he thinks I'm bound to be easy on him now, because of that affair the other day; but he knows very little about me, if he thinks I'll let private gratitude interfere with regimental duty. I'll work him, the young scamp, and see if I can't take the devil out of him that way."

"I'm afraid not, Major ; instead of the devil's lying dormant, as he does now, you will only rouse him into life, I think. Bad as is his best—and I think it's his best we see now—he has in him the capabilities and inclinations to be much worse. Let him be, sir, if you take my advice."

"Let him be!" repeated Major Campbell, when Morton was gone—"yes, that advice may suit an easy-going man like you, my friend, but I intend those under me to obey me because they must, and not because I never interfere with them, and they therefore have nothing that they can disobey. I know that fellow will give me trouble—I wish he was out of this."

A day or two after the conversation just related, orders came to join the regiment, which had moved to the Permanent Barracks, Aldershot. The Major had begun to go about again, and communicated this intelligence as they were sitting down to mess.

"I suppose we shall start for Aldershot by the end of the week, Major?" asked Morton.

"Very likely—I hope so, I'm sure," replied the Major, turning to answer Morton. "I shall be glad when the Colonel takes command again,

for I'm fairly worn out with all I've gone through lately."

On hearing which acknowledgment, Mount-eagle grinned as he bent over his plate; and Morton, who saw the smile, thought it was not a pleasant one.

Everything went on more quietly after this, for, in spite of his irritability, the little Scotchman liked peace, and was absolutely afraid to interfere with his unruly subaltern. Thus the move to Aldershot was accomplished without any other outbreak occurring between the two; and Morton hoped that when removed from under Major Campbell's more immediate control, matters might once more go on peaceably. For a while everything went on quietly enough—the Major did not cross Mounteagle's path often; and if they did meet, nothing more than the slightest possible recognition passed between them. Accident, however, disturbed this peace, which was indeed like the treacherous slumber of the volcano, in whose caverns devastation and ruin are lying hid, ready to burst forth at the appointed time.

In this case the quarrel was serious, though

the cause was trivial, as it generally is in such disturbances. The Major, one fine morning, was crossing the open space in front of the Permanent Barracks, with his dog after him. It was a beautiful Skye-terrier, to which he was very much attached—indeed, he was a sociable little fellow, besides being very handsome, and was much liked and noticed by all his master's friends and acquaintances. As they passed across the square, they met Mouteagle coming in with his bull-dog, Spite. He had been out at breakfast somewhere, and was returning to his rooms. He passed the Major with a salute, and hurried on; not so Spite, however—he was a quarrelsome, aggressive brute, and no sooner did he spy Charlie, who was trotting on quietly with his master, than he flew on the inoffensive little Skye, and, seizing him by the neck, shook him to and fro in a manner that showed the poor little fellow would soon be killed, unless help arrived quickly. The Major flew to the rescue, and seizing the bull-dog by the back of the neck, struck him several times with his umbrella handle, to force him to let go his hold. It was all to no purpose; and then Campbell called out,

"Munteagle, come and take off this brute of yours, or I'll strangle him!"

"If you do," said Munteagle, who had returned to the scene of conflict, "I'll break your cur's neck afterwards, if Spite hasn't settled him already. Take the dog off yourself, man—it's as easy for you to do it as for me."

"I've tried, but I can't," cried the Major, in too great distress about his favourite to heed his subaltern's offensive manner.

"No, neither you nor any one else can make him let go, till he chooses to do so, unless you kill him; and I warn you it will be the worse for you if you attempt that."

"If that's the only way to save Charlie, I will do it; and thank you for telling me," answered Campbell, seizing the bull-dog by the throat, and trying to choke him off. But as he stepped forward and caught the animal, Munteagle sprang on him, and taking him by the collar of the coat, held him back, saying,

"Fair play, Major Campbell—I'm not assisting my dog, but neither shall you help yours—there, by Jove! he has finished him!" he added, as the bull-dog tossed the poor limp lifeless body of the little Skye into the air, watched it

fall, and trotted off, as if satisfied with its work.

As he spoke, the young man loosed his hold on the Major's coat-collar, and turned to leave; but Campbell, following him said,

"I have borne a great deal from you, sir, but this passes all bounds. Your conduct shall be reported to the Colonel this very morning."

"So I suppose I shall get into trouble because I didn't let you kill my dog. Very good; if you are able to do me as much harm as you wish, I shan't be long here to annoy you, I know." Thus speaking, he left the Major, and walked into barracks. At the door he met Morton, looking very grave. "I say, did you see my row with that old fellow just now?" he asked.

"I am sorry to say I did," answered the Captain, quietly. "I thought, Mounteagle, that you had promised me you would try and do better—not let your character or your life be soured by regret, or influenced by bad example; and yet I find you now acting a part which I cannot but disapprove, and which fills me with apprehensions for your future."

"Never mind—I'm not as bad as you think; only I hate that old Scotchman, and he's always in my way. I've done it now, at any

rate—he's gone off to complain at once to the Colonel, who, I suppose, will join him ; and then I shall be kicked out, if they can manage it."

"Not much more than you deserve for that last scene, if the truth were told. Answer me honestly, where do you expect that ungovernable temper of yours will lead you? It's all very fine here, where you are among people who are accustomed more or less to control themselves, even though you won't govern yourself; but just try and imagine for one minute what would happen if you were to find yourself among men as lawless and intemperate as yourself—why, there would be murder at once, and every kind of evil that contention could bring on you."

"Oh! you misjudge me," laughed the young man; "I can control my temper as well as anyone, if there is anything to gain by it. In this case, by giving way to it, I gain the gratification of my dislike; and all I can lose is my commission, which, after all, I don't much care about; there is too much confinement in a soldier's life—one is too much bound down to rule and order. If the service doesn't cut me this turn, I shall cut it before long, for I can't

even make money here, which, in some other profession, I might be doing. At any rate, I may turn a penny on my commission, if I'm not put out. What do you say to that, old fellow?"

"That I'm disappointed in you, and I see plainly you're not what I thought you were. If anyone else by any chance had acted as you have just done, they would now be overwhelmed with sorrow, for having so forgotten themselves; you, on the contrary, far from being ashamed, seem to think you have done a very fine thing. You ought to go at once and apologise to the Major, and do what you can to make amends to him for his loss, and your outrageous conduct. I hope you will have done so before I see you again." Saying this, Morton walked off, leaving Mounteagle to ascend to his rooms in a rather more subdued manner than seemed at all likely, when he left the Major in the middle of the square.

"Apologise indeed!" he muttered—"no, I did that once too often. And Morton thinks he has nothing to do but to order me to do so again, whenever he thinks fit. Spite, you brute, come here, and let me see if you're any the worse for the beating Campbell gave you."

But the bull-dog did not seem in the least injured, so that any hope he might have had of pleading the way in which it was treated, as an excuse for his behaviour, vanished, and he knew he would have to submit to the Colonel's decision, without having anything to urge in extenuation of his conduct. He had never seen their Colonel, who had been on leave when he joined, and had no idea what kind of man he might be. As far as he could judge, from the few glimpses he had caught of him since they had been in Aldershot, he was a middle-aged, grey-haired gentlemanly-looking man, about the middle height, and his face and figure seemed strangely familiar to the young man. "If there's any truth in the doctrine of metempsychosis, I have met that man in some previous state of existence, for I cannot exactly remember that I ever knew him in this; or, if I did, where it was I was acquainted with him."

As he mused thus, a message was brought to him by an orderly, to the effect that the Colonel requested Mr. Mounteagle would come up to his quarters immediately. "I'm in for it now," he thought, picking up his cap, and slowly preparing to follow the messenger. "I suppose

the least that will happen to me is that I shall have to walk. After all, I don't know that will be such a disadvantage, for I'm tired of this sort of life—drill, parade, parade, drill eternally, varied by an occasional field-day, which is even more intolerable than the monotony of every-day life. No, I can't be worse off than shut up here, with such a milk-and-water set of fools. There isn't one of them that would risk his commission for a good lark; and I was an idiot ever to think I could make something out of them." Thus musing, Mounteagle settled his belt, put on his cap, and sauntered out to the Colonel's rooms.

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER the Major had called and left that morning, Colonel Langham remained for a while meditating over the complaint just laid against that unruly subaltern, Mounteagle. The name had awakened sad recollections in the Colonel's mind ; it brought back to him the bright happy days he had spent in the little Irish town long years ago, when the love of his life had dawned, brightened, and faded, slipping from his grasp when just about to claim it for his own, leaving him a lonely, desolate man, to fight the battle of life with the world, and, above all, with his own sorrowful heart, alone. He had never loved again, he had never even married, though the good-looking Colonel of the —th might, no doubt, have found many willing to accept him, had he desired to try the experiment. He was a quiet, gentle-tempered

man now, with none of the gaiety and high spirits that had distinguished him in his merry youth, when he used to sit beside Minna Mount-eagle at picnics, and dance with her at balls. The shock of her death had been too severe, and though he had not been soured by misfortune, his mind had never regained its natural cheerfulness.

A thoughtful, kind-hearted man he was too, idolised by his widowed sister and her daughter, who lived with him, and who combined in their efforts to make life pass as pleasantly as possible, for the kind friend whose utter loneliness of soul they knew and pitied, knowing also the cause that produced it.

He sat a while, as we have said, after the Major left; and then, rising, he murmured—

“If he is her brother, as I more than half suspect, I must try and save him. Clara will help me, I am sure.”

Thus thinking, he passed into the next room, where his sister and niece were sitting; to them he related what had just occurred, and added—

“I think he must be the son of the people I knew long ago at Sloane. If he is so, for the

sake of old times I must make an effort to rescue him from the dangerous path he has chosen. Clara," he added, turning to his niece, "this is a case in which you perhaps can assist me. If he be the man I think, he is very young—not more than two and twenty, at the outside; if you were to try, you might acquire an influence over him that would keep him out of mischief, for a time at least; and knowing what you do of him, I think there can be no danger to yourself. I will bring him in to lunch after I have spoken to him."

"Indeed, uncle!" laughed the girl, looking up from her work, "you over-rate my powers. You think, because I was able to assist you in Edward Merrick's case, that I can always do it; but what may answer with one man may fail with another—and isn't it rather playing with edged tools? Mr. Merrick was an easy-going man, who never took anything very much in earnest, and therefore did not take it to heart when he found our relations must be only those of simple friendship; but this young man seems to be altogether a different character, and if I did succeed in obtaining the influence over him you wish, he might not be willing to see that


it was merely an arrangement to keep him out of mischief."

"Oh! I know you'll keep matters straight," answered her uncle, smiling at his niece's amused face. "You women have ways of managing all those kind of things, and I have more faith in your tact and discretion, Clara, than I have in those of most women."

As he spoke, he left the room, and despatched a messenger for the offending subaltern, leaving Clara looking at her mother with a comical expression of dismay.

"What shall I do, mamma?" she cried, when her uncle was out of hearing. "I think this a most dangerous experiment, from what I hear of the young man; and, indeed, I feel quite nervous about such an undertaking. I'm pretty sure to make a mess of it—don't you think so?"

"It does seem a venture, or, rather, it would seem so to anybody who didn't know you, Clara," answered her mother; "but then most people would fear for the young lady in the case, whereas on that point both I and your uncle are perfectly satisfied. Whether he is as safe, I can't tell; at any rate, your uncle is so set upon doing something for this lad, that, if



you find you can be of use, I think you may as well help him. What a power the memory of that girl exercises over him still! He fancies this young man is her brother, and therefore he is anxious to save him."

"She must have been very loveable to be so well remembered," mused the girl, not replying to her mother's observation. "I am afraid I shall never be loved as she was, because I have not the power of loving well myself. After all, it is very convenient to have no heart, but the necessary physical organ; I am sure both mamma and my uncle find my temperament useful, and if it loses one much happiness, at least it saves one much sorrow." Arrived at which conclusion, she picked up her work, that had been rather neglected the last few minutes, and went on plying busy white fingers over her embroidery.


The first glance that Colonel Langham took at Mouteagle as he entered the room, convinced him the young man was indeed the brother of his lost love—the same boy he had so often met walking with her in the streets of Sloane. Mouteagle himself, meeting the Colonel face to face in this way, saw again the resemblance that had before puzzled him; but

now, after a minute's thought, he remembered where it was they had met, and advancing, said—

“I have seen you often before, Colonel, many years ago, though I daresay you don't remember me. I am Minna Mounteagle's brother.”

He spoke curtly and harshly. With his recollection of the man, there had flashed across his mind remembrance also of the circumstances connected with that time, and he resolved at once to make use of them in any way that would so far move the Colonel as to induce him to waive punishment on this occasion. It was not a generous idea this one of Mounteagle's, for he never cared to think whether he should pain the man who had been his sister's lover, by any allusions to that bygone time; and if he had known he was inflicting suffering, not the less would he have done it, if by so doing he could gain the object he had in view.

As he spoke her name in his easy, unmoved tone, Colonel Langham covered his face with one hand, and with the other motioned him to be silent. He sat thus for a minute, during which time the young man standing beside him looked down on his bent head and agitated



frame with a strong expression of contempt on his handsome face. His mental comment was, "Then he cares for her still. By Jove, that's curious! Was she worth it? I wonder what Morton would say, if he saw all this at the end of so many years? Eight years ago—that's a long time. I wonder shall I have forgotten my trouble by that!"

Then his thoughts wandered off from the scene before him, to the last never-to-be-forgotten meeting, when he had begged love from Ethel Courtenay, as he was well convinced he never would again from any other woman; when she had scorned and insulted him, and he had left her with bitter rage and pain in his heart—rage and pain which the remembrance of that scene always awoke to fresh life, and which stung him now, as he stood in the strange, unfamiliar room, waiting for his Colonel to speak.

The silence lasted but a few seconds, and yet in that short space of time all these thoughts and many more flitted through his brain; when suddenly Langham raised his head, and holding out his hand shook that of his subaltern warmly, saying,

"I knew you as soon as you came into the room. I should be glad indeed to meet you again, but for the circumstance that brings you here. Sit down and let us talk it over. I have heard the Major's version—it is this." He then rapidly sketched what the Major had told him, which was a plain, unvarnished account of the matter as it occurred. "That is his story," said the Colonel, as he finished; "now tell me yours."

"That's quite correct. I have nothing more to say," replied Mounteagle, with a slight relapse into his ordinary sullen manner when anything went wrong. "I didn't choose he should kill my dog, and I didn't let him."

"He would not have killed it," answered Colonel Langham, a little annoyed at seeing that the culprit seemed to feel not the slightest contrition for his fault, and evidently had no intention of expressing any. "You must be aware," he continued "that your conduct has been anything but becoming and subordinate. You should have tried to get the dog off yourself, as the Major asked you, and then all this trouble would have been avoided; whereas it seems you would neither do so yourself nor let him do it. Major

Campbell, in telling me the story, said that you already had several times been insolent to him, but, as you had rendered him a great service lately, he was willing and anxious to pass over everything, even this last affair, which he feels very much, poor man, on account of his dog; but that if he does so, you must clearly understand, the next offence of the kind you commit, neither he nor I will overlook, but will have you punished as severely as the regulations permit, and will not even spare you if it should be necessary to turn you out of the service. I should be deeply grieved if you forced me to take any such steps against you, because we are old friends, and for the sake of your family that I knew so well, and your sister whom I loved." The Colonel's voice failed him ever so slightly here, but he mastered himself, and went on—"I hope you will give me some promise or guarantee for your future well-doing; for, much as I desire to serve you, I cannot conceal from myself that you are not showing a good feeling in this matter. You have insulted the Major, and lost him a dog, that was as dear to him as a dear friend; he, while complaining of your conduct, as the constant happening of similar

occurrences forces him to do, yet behaves with great moderation and generosity to you. For all this kindness I hear no word of sorrow expressed by you for the trouble you have caused him—no promise of amendment for the future; and I feel it would not be my duty to let the matter pass over thus, unless some such promise were given.”

“He’s a stiffer old fellow than I had thought,” was Mouteagle’s mental comment on this speech.

When he had believed the Colonel soft and easily managed, he had made up his mind he would make no promise, nor in any way bind himself to good behaviour in the future, thinking that, for the sake of “Auld lang syne,” Langham would support him through any scrape he got into. Now it was evident the Colonel was not a man who would let private affection bias public interest, and therefore it was necessary he should make some concession, that should give him safety for the present, reserving to himself the liberty of making mistakes at times, which should be considered accidental, and treated as such by his indulgent commanding-officer.

"I'm sorry for the row, sir," he began, therefore, "and I dare say I was in the wrong, as you say I was. I will try and manage better in future, and will tell the Major that is my intention. But I have a bad temper, which overcomes me sometimes, and that's how I am so constantly getting into trouble; besides, Major Campbell aggravates me."

"All men are a little provoking at times, no doubt, and you yourself are no exception to that rule; you must try and behave well to him, and then you will find him not at all a bad fellow. I am glad you have expressed your intention of doing better in the future, and am also pleased to hear you will say as much to Major Campbell, and express your sorrow for what has occurred, because now I may allow myself to be as friendly towards you as I feel, and that you may know us all here, and be welcome in my house, let me bring you in, and introduce you to my sister and niece."

So saying, the Colonel brought the young man into the drawing-room, introduced him to the ladies, and sitting down near his sister, entered into conversation with her, leaving Clara to entertain Mounteagle.

After one or two trivial remarks about the place and weather, the young man said confidentially,

"I have got into trouble with your uncle this morning. I had a row with the Major, and have had the whole regiment, from Captains to Colonel, pitching into me ever since. Don't you think I'm to be pitied?"

His motive in thus drawing the conversation on to that subject was, that he had by this time come to the conclusion she was a very pretty girl, and fearful she should hear of his misdeeds from some one else, he determined to recount them himself, hoping that he might thereby secure her compassion, and establish a secret understanding between them, that might form the basis of a warmer friendship, should he think at any time such an intimacy would be worth his while. His surprise was great, therefore, and not pleasant either, when, in answer to his inquiry, she raised her large grey eyes, full of solemn reprobation to his, and answered,

"No, I don't pity you. I heard all about the affair, and think you were very wrong. You should have taken off your dog yourself."

"But I couldn't," he replied, colouring and

feeling confused, under the new and disagreeable sensation of being told he was to blame, by such a very pretty girl as Clara Singleton.

"Oh! nonsense," she answered, briskly. "I am sure you could if you chose; and, at any rate, you might have tried. What was the matter with you just then, for I should never have judged you capable of acting in such a manner, if I had seen you beforehand?"

She looked up at him with her pleasant, frank eyes, as she spoke, and Mouteagle began to think he should like to gain this girl's good opinion. She had such an outspoken way of saying what she thought, even when her opinion was condemnatory. It would be very nice indeed to hear her praise with equal straightforwardness and frankness.

"I have a bad temper," he said, looking down into her face, with as penitent an expression as he could assume on the spur of the moment. "It's always getting me into trouble, and making me enemies. I'm an unfortunate poor devil in every way, and I only wonder you condescend to speak to me, after hearing of my behaviour to-day."

"If you are sorry for that, and you seem to be," said the girl, gently, "I don't see why I should avoid you on account of it. Besides, you are evidently a friend of my uncle's, and that alone would make me desire that we should become better acquainted."

"Which I hope we may," he added, meeting her easy, friendly manner with as good an imitation of it as he could assume. "I am strange to these parts—tell me what you would recommend me to see."

"I don't know that there's anything particular worthy of notice here," she answered. "Strangers come to see the camp, but I daresay you will soon know that too well, if you don't already. If you are interested in military education, you can visit the colleges at Blackwater; if in hops, at the proper time of year you can see them in full beauty about Farnham; but most of the people here, when they want to see anything, go to London, and I've no doubt, for men, it's the best way."

"But what do you do?" he asked. "For surely you must have some way of amusing yourself in this stupid place."

"Oh! I get on well enough. The country

round pleases me very much. I ride a great deal, and then I can soon leave behind me the long lines of huts, and the canvas tents that whiten the brown heather here in Summer; and once out among the shady lanes and wooded roads beyond, I enjoy myself immensely. I think nothing of riding out beyond Cambridge Town, and taking a ramble through the remains of the old Windsor forest; and I go just as far in the other direction, so that although I have not been here very long, I am beginning to know the country well."

"Does your uncle accompany you?" asked Mounteagle, carelessly. He was thinking whether it might be possible for him by any chance to be her companion on some of these excursions, but he was of opinion that the old proverb spoke the truth in saying, 'Two is company, but three is none,' and so resolved to feel his way, and find what chance he would have of a *tête-à-tête*, before committing himself to any course of action.

"Sometimes my uncle rides with me," she answered; "but more generally ride with a servant. Uncle Willie would not be always able to go so far as I like to do, and therefore

it is better we should be independent. He is such a good kind old uncle to me!" she added, enthusiastically. "Not that he is very old either," she corrected. "He gives me my horse, or otherwise I should not be able to indulge in the luxury of riding, and that I certainly should feel to be a privation. There's the bell for lunch; you will stay and have some with us?"

Mounteagle accepted her invitation willingly, and as he stood holding the door open for the ladies to pass through, his eyes lingered admiringly on her face and figure.

"Not so pretty as Ethel," he thought, while his brow contracted at the remembrance of the girl he had once loved so madly; "but she's nice looking enough too."

Yes, though he did not know it, and would not have understood it had he been told such was the case, Clara Singleton, once loved, would retain a deeper hold, exercise a higher influence over a man's heart and life, than the beautiful, frivolous coquette, whom he held to be the only woman he had ever seen worth loving. But this girl was true and single-minded, and with all her pleasant, re-assuring frankness, would never try to win any man's

heart for her own selfish gratification and triumph. Even now while, by her uncle's desire, and with the object of saving this young man from the evil and profitless future that seemed to lie before him, she exerted herself to interest and amuse him, a doubt arose in her mind as to whether she was quite justified in the course she was about to pursue. It would be all right, and matters would turn out well, if he should expect no more from her than the sisterly regard that, from what she had seen of him, she told herself she would very willingly give.

But how would it be, and what excuse could she make for her conduct, if he should ask more from her,—as she knew from experience might well be the case—and should urge that she had encouraged and led him on, in excuse for his folly? She shrunk from the idea, and was a little more reserved in her manner to him during lunch in consequence, so that he was unable to find out much about her during that visit, and left shortly after the meal was over, promising to call again before long. He had found out one thing, however, and that was that she rode every day, going out about

eleven o'clock, and he was determined many days should not elapse before he would meet her, and prosecute his acquaintance under more favourable circumstances than those of the morning. For he, being utterly ignorant of the conversation between uncle and niece, and totally misjudging the girl's character, imagined she had been embarrassed by the presence of her mother and uncle, and that the little restraint he had observed in her manner at lunch would vanish at once, when she found herself alone with him.

On entering his rooms, he found Slingsby in full possession :

"Where have you been, Mount, all the morning?" cried that young gentleman. "I'm sure I have been waiting here an hour for you, and at last, to beguile the time, helped myself to one of your cigars. I want you to come with me to try a new horse I had sent down from the governor's place yesterday. Where were you all this time?—and what did the Colonel say to you when you were there, about the row this morning?"

"I've been at the Colonel's ever since. We found out we were old friends, so he asked me

to lunch, and I've had a very pleasant morning."

"Did you see his pretty niece, Miss Singleton?" asked Slingsby, anxiously; then, as Mounteagle nodded an answer, he went on: "You are the luckiest fellow I know; I meet that girl often out riding, and I'd give my eyes to know her, but I have no chance, I should think, of ever being introduced; and you, who don't care a straw about her, or any woman, are able to go into her house, and meet her as often as you like!"

"Just so," said Mounteagle, solemnly; "it's the way of the world. A way by which I mean to profit, too, for she seems a nice girl; and I shall go in for her, I think, for want of something better to do."

"You'd better take care you don't singe yourself," answered Slingsby, warningly; angry at hearing the idol he could only hope to worship at a distance, spoken of in such very free and easy terms by a man for whose moral qualities Slingsby, to say the least, entertained no very profound respect.

"Singe myself!" laughed the other—"no fear of that. The singeing process was performed

long ago by such an able practitioner, that she burnt to the bone, and there is nothing left to singe now. No, I may get a little amusement, and I daresay she will too, if she's up to that kind of thing, which I don't know yet; but further than that I shall not go. Where's your horse? Let's go and see it; and, if you like, I'll ride it to-morrow."

"Oh! it's not for riding I want it," replied Slingsby. "I could do that myself, without requiring your assistance; but I want to drive it, and as I fancy it has never been in harness before, I thought I'd ask you to come and give it the first few lessons."

"Oh! that's it—is it? Very well, I don't mind helping you; but I am going out on business to-morrow morning, so you must do without me until the afternoon."

The business that was taking him out, was, that he intended watching which way Clara Singleton went, following her, and meeting her when well away from camp, as if by accident. He was thus pretty sure of being able to secure a good long *tête-à-tête* with her.

After he had left, Clara was asked, both by her mother and her uncle, what she thought of

the obstreperous subaltern, who had given the Major so much trouble.

"I hardly know what to say yet," she answered. "He seemed sorry when speaking of that affair this morning, so perhaps he's not as bad as he gets the credit of being."

"Seemed sorry, did he?" said her uncle; "that's more than he did with me. However, if he really is so, there's some hope for him. Perhaps, after all, you'll be able to make him quite a different man, when he gets more under your influence; I think he seemed to like you to-day."

"Your plan of reforming him is a very bad one, uncle," she answered. "I am sure he's dangerous; he gives me an uncomfortable feeling, as if we were petting a tiger, that might at any minute turn round and devour us."


"My dear Clara, how very high-flown you are becoming!" cried her mother. "That is rather an exaggerated simile to apply to the young man, who, whatever his conduct to his brother-officers may be, was remarkably quiet and well-behaved with us."

"Well, I suppose I have taken a prejudice

against him, mamma," she answered; "and I would much rather I had not got the rôle of tiger-tamer laid out for me. However, I dare say that's laziness on my part, because I have not any particular fancy for him, and I ought not to be encouraged in laziness; so, uncle, whenever your *protégé* comes again, I will try and be most civil to him."

Thus was Clara Singleton led into a friendship with Herbert Mouteagle, that was not destined to add to her happiness, a presentiment of which may have been the cause of her disinclination to undertake the part assigned to her.

Next day Mouteagle contrived to meet Clara as she was riding to pay some visits at Blackwater; and as they were both going in the same direction, he asked permission to accompany her as far as their roads lay together. Not very willingly, Clara acceded to this request; but before long her prejudices vanished, and she owned to herself she had been fortunate in the companion chance had sent her. For though Mouteagle was an untravelled man, and could not tell of hairbreadth escapes by flood and field, and I question if, in




these days, such converse would captivate many listeners—to most people they would have a flavour of egotism that would mar the charm—still he was a well-read man, and could talk with a kind of brilliancy on any subject brought forward. Also he did not fall into the fault so common to most men in talking to women, than which a greater mistake cannot be made, of talking down to the supposed level of the female understanding.

Though he had little respect or liking for the other sex, he credited them with the possession for the most part of a quick intelligence, and was of opinion anything he chose to converse about, and cared to explain, would be readily entered into by them. When he desired to please, his conversation was clever and original; indeed he found his companion, whom he had admired at first only for her large grey eyes, long black eyelashes, and pretty mouth, had other qualities worth mentioning besides these, and her pretty figure, and beautiful seat on horseback. Her intellect sharpened and brightened his; ideas seemed to come to life in his brain that had never appeared there before; thoughts and fancies

more brilliant than those that usually presented themselves, rushed to his assistance; whilst she was not only able to answer and appreciate the intellectual brightness of her companion's mind, but could seize shades of feeling, and catch inflections of thought, when he, as sometimes occurred, experienced a difficulty in expressing them with sufficient nicety.

The ride seemed quite too short to the girl, who enjoyed it without any drawback, or thought of what might be said of, or what might arise from, this sudden friendship. She had lost sight of her prejudice, and if reminded of it, would probably exclaim, that she had misjudged him—that he was a delightful companion, and could not be the dangerous or unruly member of society he had been represented to be.

When Clara Singleton went up to her own room at home, to change her habit, she sat down on the bed, and began to muse over the events of the day. Certainly she had been mistaken in distrusting Herbert Mounteagle, though even now she could not feel quite sure that he was all that he ought to be, all that she would wish him to be; but, at any rate, he was
the wild mischievous character he had been

represented; he had been misunderstood and mismanaged, she thought; but to those whom he liked, she was sure he was of a generous, amiable nature; which, after all, if she had stopped to reflect a little, she would have seen was not saying much of him. We can most of us be generous and amiable where our affections are engaged.

"He likes me, I think," she continued; "and perhaps, as Uncle Willie suggested, I may be able to do him good; it was selfish of me to be so unwilling to try what I could do, and conceited of me too, to imagine there might be danger to him. I think we shall both be pretty safe, and the friendship promises to be pleasant—he is such an agreeable companion!" With which conclusion she got up, and proceeded to change her habit for her walking-dress, as her mother was waiting for her to go out. At dinner that day, she related to her mother and uncle the morning's *rencontre*, telling a good deal of their conversation, and saying that she thought him most amusing.

"Then you have got over your prejudice of yesterday," said the Colonel; "for I hear nothing more about the tiger."

"That was a prejudice," she answered, blushing a little; "and a most unjust one, I fancy it was; for, on better acquaintance, I see nothing of what I imagined."

"Then you and he are likely to become good friends? Mind you keep him in order; and, above all things, make him be civil to the Major, for there's where the shoe pinches, and that is just what you will find it most difficult to persuade him to be."

"You expect too much from me, uncle; I don't know enough of him to have much power over him about anything, and I have a kind of idea that he would not be very amenable to a woman's influence. I don't know why it is I fancy that, but I do think it, and believe also that if anyone ever gains the upper-hand over him, it will not be me."

"You under-rate your talents for tiger-taming," laughed her uncle. "I am asking a few people to dinner to-morrow, and will see if he will join us. Poor boy! for the sake of old times, I should like to see promise in him of better things than he has shown any signs of at present."


Clara said nothing, but perhaps her inward

conviction was, that the said poor boy did not deserve the epithet, or the pity lavished on him. There was a strong self-reliance about him that quite prevented her from commiserating him, even for the scrapes into which he was continually falling; for she had penetration enough to see he could very well have avoided them had he chosen, and even the moderate amount of sorrow he expressed, when speaking of them to her, did not sound very real. But, instead of mistrusting him on that account, as might have been natural, she calmly concluded that he had some good reason for his behaviour, and having it, was right to act as he had done.

Clara's ordinary common sense was not as clear as usual when thinking of her new acquaintance; a fact of which, if her uncle had been aware, he might not perhaps have been so anxious to increase the intimacy between them. For even with all his affection for Minna's memory, and all his anxiety to serve her brother, it would have been the last thing he would have desired to see an attachment springing up between them. But Clara was four and twenty, and had never been in love with anybody; from which her mother and

uncle argued that, though the best girl in the world, she was perfectly free from that dangerous incumbrance, a heart, and might be trusted to take care of herself, with anyone, under any circumstances. She fully concurred in the verdict respecting her affections herself, and was rather proud of her character for heartlessness in that respect, being inclined to look upon love, and all its attendant pleasures and troubles, as nonsense; a pastime invented for the amusement of those who had nothing better to do. Even when she changed her opinion of Mounteagle so suddenly, it never entered into her head to think she might be in danger, from her uncle's scheme for his subaltern's reformation. She had feared for him, as even her reputation for coldness had not kept some foolish individuals from running after her, but now that she knew him better, she saw that it was quite safe; and, though she had little hope of benefiting him as her uncle had intended, at any rate the friendship might be pleasant to them both.

Mounteagle, when he had time to think over the events of the day, felt a little puzzled. He knew quite well that he neither loved her, nor



was likely to do so, but, for all that, he was beginning to feel an admiration for her, very closely approaching to that feeling; and he had a very strong and well-defined desire that she should love him.

“After all, I may never be able to get the woman I care for,” he mused. “It isn’t likely; and this girl would be the next best thing to her. I wonder if old Langham would give her anything in the way of a fortune? I hear he came into some money a year or two ago, and is very well off. I shall decidedly prosecute the opening I have got; this card may turn up trumps. Now for Slingsby and his horse!”

Poor Slingsby! you may be sure Mounteagle spared him nothing in reciting the adventures of the day; and the little Ensign was really deeply in love, though, as yet, he had never had an opportunity of speaking to the object of his admiration.

“You are a lucky fellow, and no mistake,” he said with a sigh, when Mounteagle had finished speaking; “I would give a year’s pay to know her, and be able to talk to her as you do.”

“It would be a dead loss then,” laughed Mounteagle, with his cigar between his lips,


and touching the young horse with the whip as he spoke; "she wouldn't look at you."

"I can't see why you should say that," objected Slingsby. "I ain't good-looking like you, I know; but that's no reason why you should say she wouldn't look at me. She has too kind a face to be proud or disagreeable."

"Oh! for mercy's sake, if you're going to sing her praises all the way, let me get out and go home. I'm not at all up to that pitch; and 'It is a bore the greatest of all the bores I know, to have a friend who lost his heart a short time ago.' You've heard that, of course, so please remember it, and don't let's have any more of Miss Singleton's perfections. I can look at them, if I want to know anything about them."

"Very well," sighed the little man beside him, "I'll not mention the subject again, and it was you began it this time. I say, I think you're driving very badly, and we shall come to grief, if you don't mind."

When Mounteagle returned to barracks, and found a card from Colonel Langham, with a few words pencilled on it, asking him to dinner next day, he muttered:



"Well, if any harm comes of it, it is not my fault; this old fool is so full of his remembrances of years ago, that he forgets I am not quite such a boy now as I was then, and that my manner of bringing up, and life altogether, have not made me particular as to how, when, or where I get amusement. After all, why shouldn't I get as much fun as I can out of the connection? Every man for himself, is my motto in this world, and every woman also; and those who can't follow that precept, had better go to the wall at once, say I."


Acting on this precept, he set out for Colonel Langham's house next evening, fully determined to make himself as agreeable as possible to Miss Singleton, and, as he said before, to get as much fun out of the connection as possible. Mrs. Singleton and her daughter were the only ladies, but there were six gentlemen besides the Colonel and himself; and Mounteagle, by skilful manœuvring, succeeded in securing a place for himself beside the young lady at dinner.

She was looking prettier than he had ever seen her, dressed in black, with a high body open in a heart shape in front, and a crimson rose in her magnificent dark brown hair. She

seemed pleased when he seated himself beside her, and gave him one of the charming frank looks, that expressed her thoughts so openly, as a reward for the trouble he had taken to secure it.

“Decidedly, if my heart had not all been given away long ago,” he thought, “this girl would wile it from me.” Thinking thus, he used every art he was master of to win hers from her.

She was no match for him at this, because she was so inexperienced, but yet hers was not a nature to be very easily won. Naturally reserved where she experienced any powerful emotion, she mistrusted outspoken passionate feeling. It was so natural to her to conceal symptoms of such a nature, that she could not conceive it possible one who was moved by genuine feeling of any kind, would let the world around be participators in his emotion. And this man, who gave his whole attention to her—whose eyes, when they met hers, spoke such unmistakeable admiration, and, she thought, something more in their glance—whose very voice, when he addressed her, seemed to take a different tone—surely if he felt all this implied, he would have been more chary of exhibiting it



before his brother-officers and her uncle? For she feared they all noticed it, and fearing this, she became stiff and uncomfortable, and was very glad indeed when her mother gave the signal that she might rise from table and escape. But she had hardly reached the drawing-room, when her penance was continued in a new form.

"It seems to me, dear," said her mother, "that your uncle's plan has made great progress, and that this young man is very devoted to you at present. But I hope you will take care of yourself; indeed, for both your sakes, I think you had better be cautious how you let it go any farther."

"For his sake, certainly, mamma; as for me, you know I am safe. '*Figure d'ange, cœur d'acier*,' as Monsieur de Verigny once described me; though I think the first part of the sentence is too flattering—the last is true enough." And she sighed as she finished speaking.

Her mother, a quiet, indolent woman, composed herself for a nap until the gentlemen should make their appearance; and she, moving softly to the window, stood looking out into the street. Not that there was much to see there by the dim gaslight, though she opened

the shutters and stood with her face against the panes, as though, in the dim October night, she could trace some absorbing spectacle. She was thinking, not looking at anything, and her thoughts were a trifle sad; sadder than Clara Singleton generally indulged in, for she was not given to moping, and indeed had no cause for doing so. She was blaming herself for her distrust of this man, who seemed so strongly attracted towards her.

"I wish I could believe in him," she thought; "I am sure he cares for me; he could not act so. And yet I know many men do; and I dare not like him as I might, until I am sure I am not throwing my heart away. That would be dreadful, to give all one has got, oneself entirely, for a dream, a myth; to awake some morning from a fool's paradise, and find one has been deceived. No, I know he has got something in him I could love; I feel drawn towards him, but I'll keep a tight hand on the reins, and not let my fancy run away with me, till I know where it's taking me. What a cold, calculating woman I am!—just this very determination not to love till I know how much I am loved, may cost me the happiness of my life, if

it frightens away the only man I could have cared for. And yet I can't run the risk, for if I found out my mistake too late, I should—no, I should not break my heart, I am not weak enough for that; but I should harden, become harder than the hardest stone, to all the griefs and troubles and sorrows of this sorrowful world; and, thank Heaven, *cœur d'acier* though I may be, I haven't lost my human sympathies yet. Yes, though I could throw myself away, as far as worldly matters are concerned, and do it gladly, I cannot do so with my heart, for that, if lost, would carry my soul with it, and we have none of us a right to lose that."

As she leant thus musing against the window, gazing with sad dry eyes into the lonely street, a voice that she was beginning to know very well, said close beside her :

"How unutterably sorrowful you are looking, Miss Singleton ! What thoughts can they be, that bring such an expression into your face ?"

She roused herself and smiled with an effort as she said :

"I had no business to look sad. I was thinking of the sorrows of the world, in which I have no share."

"What sorrows?" he asked, quickly. "Perhaps I can tell you about them."

She looked at him doubtfully. There was something in him that invited her confidence, even while she mistrusted him; and, on his repeating again softly, "Tell me," she answered:

"I was thinking how lost, how desperate a woman must feel, who has given all she has to give—her heart—to a man who either does not care for it, or, having cared, gets tired of it, and leaves her. Ah! that is the saddest fate of all. I could not bear it!" she exclaimed, with sudden energy, and a burst of emotion most unusual to her self-contained character.

He looked at her admiringly, as she turned her flushed face and sparkling eyes to him and the light; his heart began to beat quicker than he had ever thought it would at the voice of any woman but one, and he answered, with a spark of sympathetic emotion:

"I don't believe you could. You are not one of those that are born to be loved and left."

Then they were silent, and Clara, looking back into the room, perceived that he must have left the dining-room before the others.

“ But what put such a train of thought into your head ? ” he asked, after a pause, bending towards her, and feeling as if he were really interested in the answer ; then, as no reply came, he continued : “ Why won’t you tell me ? Surely, you are not afraid of me ? ”

He waited breathlessly for some response ; though he knew quite well the feeling he entertained for this girl was not real love, still it was a counterfeit very closely resembling the original, and the silence and suspense tortured him. In thinking over his intercourse with Clara Singleton, Mounteagle attributed the influence she had so suddenly acquired over him to the unusual and superior order of her intellect ; he under-estimated the power of her beauty greatly, being biassed beforehand in favour of a very different style ; and yet the girl now before him would, to the generality of men, have been the most attractive of the two—at least when once known, as he knew her now.

He repeated his question again impatiently, and as she slowly raised her head to reply, for one moment he thought that he had conquered this cold, pure heart, subdued this proud, self-contained mind ; for one moment her eyes rested

on him with a different expression in their depths from that which usually dwelt there ; then the old merry look returned, as she met his glance with provoking archness, and said :


"It must have been a novel I was reading that started so melancholy a subject in my mind. When one has no sorrows of one's own, those of the imagination become very real. Now I will go and sing you something ; that will have the double effect of waking mamma, and bringing those other people up from the dining-room."

But he placed himself before her, and pleaded :

"Don't go yet. I don't want to hear you sing—at least not now," he corrected himself. "Afterwards, when everyone is up, and we can get no more conversation together, I shall be delighted to listen to you ; but now I had rather you would talk."

"You shouldn't have said that," she laughed, "for I shall be able to think of nothing to say. What were you doing with yourself to-day ?"

"Never mind that," he answered, impatiently. "Why will you talk about all kinds of stupid things, when you know well I don't




care for anything of the sort? There's only one subject can interest me now, and you know well what that is."

"Indeed, I don't," she replied, her heart fluttering as she spoke, and an intense desire coming over her to escape from this window, where she was regularly prisoned; Mounteagle standing before her with one hand resting on the half-turned back shutter, thus completely closing her in.

"Shall I tell you, then?" he asked in low tones, that seemed to her ears full of meaning. "I only want to hear about you; I only want to think about you; I don't want to care about anything in the world but you. No, don't be frightened," he added, as she made another effort to pass him; "I am not going to say anything more that can annoy you; if what I have said already has done so. I know I have no business to speak thus to you; I have known you too short a time, and it would be presumptuous to imagine, or dare to hope, that you could feel for me as I do for you, but if you will forgive me this indiscretion, I promise you shall not be troubled again, without your own consent. Will you forgive me?"

"I will forgive you," she answered, in a very low tone; "but, Mr. Mounteagle, you are very foolish to act in this way. It is well that it is only I to whom you have said all this nonsense. With me it is safe, and shall never be remembered again; but if you do it often to other people, you will surely get into trouble."

"Often!—other people!" he repeated angrily. "Do you mean to say that you think the words I have said to you this night, I would say to any one else on earth? You have a good opinion of me, truly! I suppose I ought to be obliged, too, for your promise not to think of my words again; and I'm such an ill-conditioned scoundrel, I don't feel one bit obliged! I'd rather you did think of them again, if I had my way. I suppose I shall get pulled up now, for having said that. What a cruel, hard-hearted set you are, to be sure! I often wonder have women any feeling, when they treat a poor fellow who loves them, worse than they would treat a dog?" He stopped and covered his face with one hand for a minute, whilst Clara stood trembling in the corner, wishing the gentlemen would come up and put an end to the scene, or that she dared put out her hand



to take his and comfort him. It was "marvellous well-counterfeited," no doubt, but it was counterfeit in a great part; and she, though calling herself harsh names for her unbelief, felt it to be so. Presently he removed his hand, and looking her calmly in the face, said: "At any rate, whatever you think of me, however you feel towards me, there is no reason we should quarrel. Promise me that you will never be angry with me."

"Yes," she answered, very glad to drift away from the dangerous subject, that had been occupying them for the last half-hour, "if you wish it, I will promise that."

"Never mind, no matter what you hear of me?" he asked, holding out his hand.

"Never, unless you give me very serious cause," she replied, without appearing to notice the hand he held out to her.

"And you won't mind anything you are told against me? You won't hate me, even if you hear I have done wrong, and it is proved to be true? You will ever be the same to me?"

"I think so," she answered. "I am slow generally to take such promises; only you have forced this one on me, I should have been un-

willing to bind myself to a good opinion of anyone ; but having once given my word, I never alter. You, no doubt, may cease to care whether I remember ; your life is full of the elements of change, and men are naturally more inconstant than women, but I shall not forget my promise, you may be sure."

"Don't talk of change," he replied hurriedly, dropping the hand he held, "it touches on dangerous topics, and I cannot trust myself to speak of it. Here are the gentlemen," he added in a calm tone, as a movement was heard on the stairs ; and standing aside, he let her pass into the room, busying himself with closing the shutters.

CHAPTER VIII.

IF any of the gentlemen who at that moment entered the room had been very observant, they might have guessed something unusual had happened. A bright pink spot was on Clara's cheek, and her eyes looked troubled. There was none of the calm, serene light of a few hours ago in their brilliancy, while her spirits were high and unequal. As to Mount-eagle, he was composure itself; a little scene such as he had just gone through, where the heart was not enough touched to make it painful, was only a pleasant excitement to him; and besides, though constantly baffled in his attempt to win from her some mark of preference, he felt that he was making his way with her, that before long this untamed spirit would be subdued by him, ready to submit to his will, and devote itself to securing his happiness. And

then, even if he never cared more for her than he did at present, that would be a great triumph; that he should win the heart that so many had failed to win, that he should conquer the spirit that many had sought to conquer, and had not succeeded in their endeavours! Yes, and if the Colonel was inclined to act liberally, he might some day consent to marry her; it would not be a bad thing for him to be married to Colonel Langham's favourite niece.

How pretty she did look standing there under the chandelier, talking to Montessor of the —th Hussars! He almost felt jealous as he watched their animated conversation, quite forgetting there was much less danger in that, than in the low-toned, disconnected talk they had had before the others came up. He was not sorry when he saw her leave Montessor and move to the piano, with the intention of singing, and he stepped forward to arrange the music-stool, and turn over the pages for her, if she would allow him that privilege.

She had a beautiful contralto voice, of the tone and quality that reminds one of velvet; she had been well taught, and her singing was always something far superior to what young

ladies generally accomplish. But to-night, the excitement she had gone through gave a power and passion to her voice never heard in it before, and she fairly surpassed herself, moving her hearers to a degree that astonished them, and rendered them incapable of expressing the usual insipid compliments, when she had finished. She did not miss their words, however—indeed, was better pleased to go without them, for she had sung before people long enough to know, that any music that touches the heart is felt to be beyond such empty praise, and that the greatest tribute she could receive was the intense silence that followed her last notes, as if those around still listened, unwilling to disturb the charm. Then a low buzz of approbation followed, but she could not distinguish what was said, until Mounteagle, leaning over her, entreated that she would give them another. She complied, and later on in the evening, when, for a few minutes, they were sitting on a causeuse in a corner of the room, he said :

“I cannot tell you what I think of your singing, or thank you enough for the pleasure you gave me. If you were dangerous before, you

are ten times more so now, when you have changed from a Circe to a siren."

She laughed.

"Your compliments are too high-flown. Mr. Montessor's mournful face was a greater tribute to my power, and though he has not said a word to me about it, I know he feels far more enjoyment in music than you do."

"In music, perhaps," he answered; "but not in your music. That can never mean as much to him as it does to me, for we are friends—are we not?" he added, seeing by the contraction of her brow that the meaning he had expressed in the first part of his sentence was not acceptable.

"It is not necessary to be the friend of a singer in order to appreciate the music sung," she answered perversely; "for, in that case, I should prefer your attempts, if you could be induced to make any, to Mr. Montessor's finished artistic performance."

"Just look how that fellow Mounteagle is going in for Miss Singleton," growled Montessor to a brother-officer named Bateman, standing near him.

"Yes, and she seems to like it too," replied

Captain Bateman. "But I wonder at Langham's allowing it; I hear the young man is a great scamp."

"Well, the colonel of his regiment ought to know that better than anybody," replied Montessor. "I say, don't you think it's time for us to be going?"

They all left shortly after, Clara retiring to rest with a bewildered, uncomfortable sensation, as though she had been doing something wrong, and couldn't exactly remember what it was.

"Well, little one," said her uncle, as she wished him good night, "I think you have carried out my ideas wonderfully. He was quite civil to the Major to-night, and there is no doubt he was tremendously devoted to you."

"Rather too devoted, I think," Clara said, laughing to hide her confusion. "I should be better pleased if he was not always running about after me, like a little dog."

"Oh! never mind that; he'll get out of it again in time," replied her uncle; "and, in the meanwhile, it keeps him from getting into mischief. I told him if he would come here to lunch to-morrow, you would go out to ride with

him afterwards. You don't think it too great a bore, do you, dear? I am so anxious that young man should be kept straight."

"More anxious for that than for your niece's happiness," she thought, a little bitterly; "unless indeed it be possible that my mother knows nothing about it, and that my uncle wishes me to marry him. A bore!" she replied then, gaily; "oh! no, I can bear him. At any rate, it won't be for long, as I am going down to the Chetwynds at Brighton in a day or two. You have forgotten that, uncle."

"So I had. All the more reason that you should give this young fellow a little good advice before you leave. When do you go?"

"The day after to-morrow, I think. I wrote to Mrs. Chetwynd to tell her I would go to her on that day, if it suited her, and I expect an answer to-morrow."

Just as Clara was going into her own room, her mother called her from hers, which opened into Clara's. She went in and found her mother in the hands of her maid. Speaking in French, Mrs. Singleton again warned her daughter to beware.

"I don't know what your uncle's views are,"



she said; "but I am certain it is not a match he would approve of, and I am pretty sure, from Mr. Mounteagle's behaviour to-night, that he will propose before long, if you don't take care. You will no doubt say, that in that case you can refuse him, but, apart from that being a painful task at any time, I am sure this young man is of a disposition that will be very determined in carrying any plan upon which he sets his fancy, and whom it will be almost impossible to shake off, if once he makes up his mind to marry you."

"No fear of that, mamma; he's amusing himself. Only I am such a hard and heartless individual, I should be much more likely to come to grief in this business."

At last she was shut into her own room; at last she was free to think, but she would not do that yet, she would wait until she had lain down, and then go over the whole affair calmly. When she did come to think of it, and tried to discover what was the real meaning of Herbert Mounteagle's conduct, she was puzzled, and could come to no clear understanding of the matter. Some will say she was foolish in that—that she ought to have been able to

comprehend at once from his words and manner that he loved her—but that was exactly what she couldn't see. She knew quite well he intended her to think so, but there was something about the very openness with which he let her see his meaning, that caused her to doubt his sincerity. Real love, she fancied, was a much more retiring, timid sentiment than this which he showed so openly. She had read in books, certainly, that those who feel deeply find a difficulty in expressing their affection at first to the beloved; at any rate, this did not seem to be the case with her uncle's *protégé*.

As to her own feelings with regard to him, they were even more incomprehensible to her than his conduct. She liked him very much, she told herself, better than any man she had ever met, for many reasons; but then she saw his faults plainly, and she had an idea that if she loved a man, she would not be able to see any fault in him. Clearly, therefore, she could not care for him in that way; but he had upset the calm equanimity of her mind, and made her feel very uncomfortable, for which she was not thankful to him.

Then, her mother said he would ask her to marry him; in that case, what answer should she give? Oh! the reply to such a question was easy enough; she would refuse him, of course—she had not known him long enough to think of marriage, and what she had heard of him was not to his advantage. But she hoped, if matters ended thus, he would not go off in a huff and never see her again; he had made her promise they should be friends always, and that did not sound as though he intended to forget her, whatever happened. It was a strange position to be in, she didn't quite know what to make of it; she didn't think it much mattered what she made of it, things would take their course just the same, and turning over on her side, she was presently asleep.

Mounteagle, when he left the Colonel's house, walked straight to Slingsby's rooms, where he knew he would find some fellows smoking and talking. He was not disappointed in his expectation, and in a few minutes was the life and soul of the whole party, very different in appearance and manners from the sentimental and apparently almost broken-hearted individual, who had stood in the embrasure of the window.

with Clara Singleton, earlier in the evening.

When Mrs. Singleton heard of the ride in project next day, on the occasion of its being discussed at breakfast between uncle and niece, she could no longer contain herself, and taking her brother by the arm, after the meal was over, she led him into the window, and, waiting till Clara had left the room, began :

“My dear brother, are you thinking of what you are doing, sending Clara out to ride with that young man? Were she any other girl but who she is, it would be most dangerous for her.”

“Precisely so,” answered Colonel Langham, slowly. “It is just because she is the kind of girl she is, that I trust her in a position where few are to be trusted, and that I think she will be able to benefit the son of my old friends, more than anyone else I know can benefit him.”


“But he shows very plainly that it is dangerous for him, and surely you cannot wish to expose anyone for whom you have a regard to such a trial and temptation—such a terrible sorrow as, from all appearance, this seems likely to prove to him?”

“Don’t be uneasy, Alice. As far as he is con-

cerned at present, there is a vast deal more acting than reality in his devotion; what his object may be I cannot tell, but I am certain of the truth of what I assert. And I think, even were he more in earnest than he is, so young a man would soon get over the wound, and be a better character all through life, for his temporary association with such a woman as Clara."

"You may be quite right in all that," answered the cautious mother, who had refrained from using her last and most powerful argument until the others had failed, "but consider how everyone will talk! You may be sure his devotion last night is known over the whole camp by this time, and, after the ride this afternoon, I should not be one bit surprised if, by to-morrow, an announcement of their approaching marriage appears in the paper. Really I cannot allow it, William; it will get the girl such a bad name."

"Very well," he answered; "I believe you are right as to that, and I must not sacrifice her in my anxiety to befriend him. However, as it is all settled for this afternoon, and as she goes to Brighton the day after, I think we won't



alter our plans ; particularly as I am going part of the way with them, and we shall all leave camp together."

"That makes it very much better certainly ; but then they will return alone. However, as you say, it can't be helped now ; I am glad you see that it must not go on." And satisfied with having thus ably fulfilled her maternal duties, Mrs. Singleton walked off.


The first part of the ride was quiet enough that afternoon, and Mounteagle was unutterably disgusted when he found Colonel Langham of the party, for he was not aware the Colonel only intended accompanying them a short distance, and he attributed this sudden presence of a chaperon to some particular request on the part of Clara. He looked at her whenever he dared, in a reproachful manner, which she, who understood thoroughly what was passing in his mind, enjoyed immensely, though without showing in her face the amusement she was experiencing.

After about half an hour's ride, they arrived at the place where her uncle intended leaving them. He had to pay a visit to an old invalid gentleman, who lived in a fine house on the

road to Reigate, and, as he turned in at the gate, he waved his hand to them, telling Mounteagle to take care of her, and bring her back in time for dinner.

For a few minutes after he disappeared neither spoke, but finding presently the silence becoming irksome, Clara turned to look at her companion, with the intention of making some remark which should dissipate the constraint that seemed to have arisen between them. She met Mounteagle's eyes fixed on her with a singular expression, the meaning of which she did not at all understand; but the intensity of the gaze was such, that her eyes fell abashed, and she turned away her head, unable to say the few words she had intended. Though she was determined not to look again in his direction until he spoke, she could feel he was still gazing at her, and grew both hot and indignant at this extraordinary conduct. Gathering up her reins, and, in her anger, striking her spirited grey a smart stroke with the whip, she flew off at a gallop along the turf by the road-side, letting her escort follow as he could.

When at length she pulled up, he was by her side in a minute, and this time he spoke, in a



voice of such deep feeling, that it lent a more intense meaning to his words than by themselves they could convey :

"One third of the ride was lost by your uncle's being with us," he said ; "another third has been lost by that last gallop of yours, and to-morrow, your uncle told me, you were going to Brighton. Is it possible you are trying to avoid me ?"

The man's voice was so earnest, and his eyes looked so searchingly into hers, that she felt her courage failing her, and had recourse to pertness to hide her embarrassment :

"Take it so, if you please," she answered ; "only mind I never said it was so."

"Don't," he replied earnestly—"don't speak to me with that manner. You are not a coquette by nature ; don't adopt it when talking to me. There was no sign of coquetry about you when I met you for the first time the other day ; it surely cannot be that my company has already so far injured you, as to endue you with that fatal fault ! Be yourself always, open and frank as when first I saw you ; you can never be in any way more charming."


She looked at him gravely, and a conviction

that he was right, and that coquetry was an assumption that did not become her, made her answer him simply and truly :

“ You frighten me. I really don't know what you mean the greater part of the time, and I never have the faintest idea of what may come next. You should remember I am not accustomed to people's talking to me in that way, and I don't understand it, so I try and laugh it off, as the best thing I can do.”

“ If I tell you my meaning, and make you understand me, will you not be offended ?” he asked, drawn on further than he had ever intended, by the fascination this girl exercised over him.

As long as he was with her he could in no way help acting and talking as though he loved her ; it was so pleasant to watch the soft pink flush rise in her delicate cheek, the innocent wonder and gratification in her clear, child-like eyes that, merely for the sake of watching and observing all this, he would go further and further, till he seemed likely to end by saying much more than, in his sober moments, when out of her sight, he would think desirable. As he asked this question, he was quite prepared,



if she seemed willing to hear him, to go even to the length of telling her he loved her; but she instinctively felt she was on very dangerous ground, and, though her voice trembled a little, she answered calmly:

"Don't make me understand anything. Your explanations might annoy me, or might not—how can I tell? You ought to know better than I. At any rate, I cannot promise, and I would rather remain in ignorance of the meaning of some of your enigmatical speeches, than that you should run the risk of breaking our newly-formed friendship."

"You are right, I believe," he said, feeling that their acquaintance had been too short for him to have any hope of success, if he should be precipitate in seeking her love. She was of a steady, well-balanced nature, not prone to sudden affections, but true to any once formed.

"We are friends, as you remind me," he went on; "and I would not do anything that could threaten to weaken that feeling between us. You have saved me, I believe, from committing a great folly; I wish I could do something to show you how grateful I am. Will you give me something to do for you?"

"That is not easy," she replied. "I know nothing I want done that you could assist me in doing, else I would willingly ask your help. Stay," she added, as a sudden thought struck her, "I will ask you to give me a proof of your friendship that I fear you will find irksome, and will not thank me for having laid such a burden upon you."

"What is it?—tell me," he asked impatiently.

"Try and live peaceably with all your brother-officers—and especially with Major Campbell, while I am away. I know that is perhaps the most troublesome thing I could ask, but all the more I shall believe in you, if you promise, and keep your word when I am gone."

"You must have been hearing pretty stories of me, I am afraid," he laughed, without exhibiting any of the sullenness such mention of his failings would have produced, had he been so spoken to by anyone else. "Indeed, you are right in saying it is the hardest task you could have imposed on me—that old beggar is so abominably provoking! But I give you my word, all the same. Are you satisfied now?"

"Amplly," she answered, with a smile. "I can go to Brighton with a comfortable convic-

tion I shall not find when I return, that you and the Major have been fighting, and that you have left the service in consequence. Really at one time, not so long ago, matters looked very like that."

"It was before I knew you, and when I often did not know what to do with myself; for I have not always been very fortunate in my life, and the remembrance of almost every event with which I have been connected, except my acquaintance with you, is bitter to me."

She did not say, but she thought, that very likely in a year or two the remembrance of his friendship with her would either have faded from his memory, or grown distasteful to him, also; she felt giving utterance to such a sentiment would do no good, so she rode on in silence, wondering why she allowed this man to talk to her in a strain she had never permitted anyone else to use when addressing her. It was all very fine to tell herself she did it to please her uncle, but she knew that it was not necessary to her uncle's programme that she should take pleasure in listening to his words; nay, more, she acknowledged, as she thought the matter over, that she should be sorry if now

he was never to address such words to her again.

"You are grave again—as grave as you were last night," he said presently; "why is that? It is not like you, and it makes me unhappy to see it. I fancy, somehow, whenever you look sad, that your sadness is caused by me."

"You have no right to find fault with me for silence and gravity; you were as silent and grave yourself. What were you thinking of?"

"I was thinking of you," he answered, simply, turning and looking at her quietly.

It certainly was the last answer in the world Clara expected, and most assuredly, had she known the reply she would get, she would never have asked the question; as it was, she did not pursue her inquiries any further, but, shortening the grey's rein, trotted on briskly, her companion riding silent beside her. They had turned, and were on their way home by this time, so, after a few minutes' rapid riding, Mounteagle spoke:

"Stop, I beg of you," he entreated; "there is no hurry about your return home, we are in

plenty of time, and after we part this evening, goodness knows when I may see you again. Let us spin out the remainder of the ride as much as possible; for though I shall see you before you go to-morrow, I shall not be able to talk to you quietly."

She pulled up as he desired her—indeed, she was not sorry to do so. She began, in spite of herself, to believe in him; it is true he was more out-spoken and open in his manifestations of feeling than her pre-conceived ideas had led her to believe ought to be the case, if his affection was sincere; but then it seemed to her impossible that he could simulate emotion with such apparent reality, if he did not experience it. Poor girl! she had yet to learn that some men find it very easy to counterfeit a passion they do not feel, and that sometimes they counterfeit so well as almost to deceive themselves, as well as the person they intend to deceive. With Mounteagle, however, there was hardly this excuse; he knew very well he didn't really care for Clara Singleton, it was her originality, her perfect unlikeness to any of the women he had met that attracted him towards her; yet all the while he was saying to himself: "She is charm-

ing, no doubt; but not like Ethel." When they reached Colonel Langham's door, and he helped her down from her horse, he said—

"I shall see you to-morrow at the train; and I'll be sure to remember all I have promised you to do in your absence." Muttering to himself, as he finished speaking: "Confounded bore it will be, to be sure!"

She, quite unconscious of this addition, looked up in his face with a grateful smile. It seemed to her he was doing such a fine thing, sacrificing the indulgence of his temper and ill-will to please her; and though she knew he must himself ultimately appreciate the increase of comfort and consideration he would earn for himself by so doing, yet she would have liked to thank him over again, then and there, for his compliance with what he must consider a whim; but at that moment the door was opened, and she prepared to enter.

"Will you come in?" she asked. "I am sure my uncle expects you to dinner."

"I should like it so much," he replied, with a little hesitation, "but I have a friend coming to dine with me at mess to-night, and I must be there. I wish I could accept your invitation."

"Well, it can't be helped," she said, with a smile, holding out her hand. "Good night, and *au revoir*."

"That was cleverly managed," he thought, as he trotted away. "I was beginning to get awfully bored, and an hour or two more, with the two old people looking on, would have finished me; I should have begun to yawn. However, I made my way to-day, and now, if I can ascertain what the Colonel would do in the matter, I think I might make pretty sure of having everything my own way. What a provoking girl she is, though; I can never be quite sure whether she likes me, or will like me, or whether she is simply on friendly terms with me, as she is with Montessor, and all that other set. However, the uncertainty makes the affair a little more exciting; if I was sure of my game, I should no longer feel an interest in it, and then this confounded place would be even more dull than it was at first. It is to be hoped she won't ask anybody who was my friend at mess to-night, for, if she caught me tripping in one thing, it would not be very easy to convince her I was sincere in anything. Well, she's off to-morrow, at any rate, and it's

not likely she'll hear about it before she leaves, so I'm pretty safe. By Jove! I hope the Colonel won't be with us to-night. No, he can't be, for she said something about his dining at home."

So thinking, Mounteagle jumped off his horse, turned him over to his servant, and the next minute was running upstairs to his rooms.

When Clara went to her room after coming in, she dressed at once for dinner, and going to the drawing-room, in which the lamp had not yet been lighted, sat down in a comfortable arm-chair before a merry, flickering fire. It was in October, and the evenings were already very cool, therefore she found the pleasant warmth, and the ruddy glow of the firelight, most favourable to the castle-building in which she wished to indulge. Not castles such as those she built in the days so lately gone by, which had fled for ever, when she delighted to fancy quaint faces and figures in the glowing embers, castles and towns and ruins, men and horses, scenes out of ancient chivalric lore, of knights in armour and damsels with dishevelled hair. No, those childish dreamland pictures had no charm for her now ;

what she tried to reproduce in the fitful glow of the firelight was the dark, handsome face that had looked so earnestly into hers ; what she tried to bring back to recollection were the tones of his voice, the meaning words he had used. And yet she did not one bit believe she was in love, and would have asserted her invulnerability as loudly as ever. She did not think, she told herself, that, if she knew that after to-morrow she should never see him again, she should feel for one moment grieved, always supposing that he was well and happy in that separation, which it pleased her to think he would not be. But if he should cease to care for her, and should love another—a termination to the affair that she was always telling herself was probable—what then ?

At that idea she winced a little, but thought she would bear even that well, if the woman who usurped her place with him made him happy ; but it pleased her to think none could make him as happy as she would. If she could be sure of him, if she were certain that those loving glances, those tender words and tones, were truthful representatives of the feelings of his heart ; but that she always doubted, and, as

she had thought once before, she could not give herself, all she had and all she was, away, until she was sure that the gift would be welcomed and valued.

"Well, dear, how did your ride go off?" asked her uncle, entering the room as she sat thus dreaming. "Do you think our friend will be quiet when you are gone; he has really been wonderfully good the last few days."

"Yes, I think he'll be more manageable," she answered cheerfully, doubting whether she should tell her uncle of the promise she had exacted or not. She decided on not doing so, and went on to speak of where they had ridden, and what they had seen and said, which was not much, to be sure, when the private parts were left out.

"And he would not come in to dinner?" repeated the Colonel, when she had finished. "Well, I suppose it was as well he didn't; your mother would not have liked it, and, as she says, it would make people talk."

Clara smiled a little to herself at her uncle's remark; if she could feel as sure of his love, as she was of being talked about as engaged to, or admired by, some one or other, quite inde-

pendent of whether she was so or not, she would feel indifferent to what anybody said about her. But the case, standing as it did, she could not but acknowledge it was better to be careful. When she was saying good night to her daughter that evening, Mrs. Singleton observed :

“ Well, I’m glad you are going to Brighton . for a while, child, though I shall miss you dreadfully ; but, at any rate, there you will be out of the way of that young man that William is so infatuated about. It’s a great mercy you can keep your heart so well, though how a daughter of mine manages to do so, is more than I can tell.”

“ Perhaps I have none, mother,” answered Clara gaily, kissing her mother, and passing on into her own room, where she threw herself on her bed, and tried vainly to force back the few scalding tears that rose to her eyes. For she was beginning now to discover that she had a heart, and she was not quite sure whether she should be able to keep it under her own control until she found some one willing and able to take care of it for her.

The train by which she was to leave next

day was not due at the North Camp station till twelve o'clock, therefore there was none of the hurry and bustle in the morning that usually accompany an early departure. Clara's tears had all been shed in a few minutes the night before, and a good rest had revived her spirits when she appeared at the breakfast-table next morning. She was now inclined to think she had been a prodigious fool ever to fancy that man had cared for her, or she for him. It was highly improbable he would be at the station when the train came in—indeed, now she thought of it, she had never told him when she intended leaving. Her high spirits fell slightly as she remembered this, but she was determined, come what might, or come who didn't, nothing should spoil her enjoyment of that trip to Brighton. Her uncle was to take her down, and would return the same day, so she would have no trouble about the journey, and would arrive at her friend's house as fresh as the dust of railway travelling would permit. She managed to eat a good breakfast, in spite of the combined excitement of the journey in prospect, and the certainty that Mr. Mounteagle would not be at the train. If he wished to be there,

it was his own fault that he didn't know the hour ; he should have asked, and, for his remissness, well deserved disappointment.

It is a question to us, who know all about it, which would have been the most disappointed of the two had he not turned up, but just as the carriage drove into the station, and she was about to get out, he came forward and helped her to descend, taking charge of her bag, umbrellas, and other impedimenta, in a way that fairly nonplussed the Colonel, and left him nothing to do, except to get the tickets ; that of course was his business, and while he went in search of them, they strolled up and down the platform, and he found time to whisper :

"If I keep my promise to you whilst you are away, will you make me one, and keep it too?"

"I will," she answered, softly, "if it's anything I may promise."

"I want you to say that you will let no fellow make you forget me. There is no harm in that?"

"No, certainly," she replied, with a smile ; "I think I may even add, unless I am away a very long time, I shall be able to remember you."

A few minutes after, and while Mounteagle was still fuming at this very vague answer to his request, they were in the carriage, the whistle sounded, and they moved slowly away; the young man's last words, as he shook hands with Clara through the carriage-window, being: "Remember your promise," spoken in so low a tone that none but she could catch them. Then the train whirled them apart, and she strained her eyes as she leant out of the window to catch the last sight of him among the crowd, as he stood motionless where she had left him, thinking of her, no doubt, she fondly told herself. She would have been rather mortified could she have read his mind at that moment; he was saying:

"What on earth shall I do with myself for the rest of the day, now that girl is gone? Though it was a bore sometimes being with her—for even flirting may become wearisome—yet it was a little excitement to be had at any time, when nothing better turned up. Decidedly, the place will be slower than ever."

Thus thinking, and the train having long passed from sight, he turned away, and, just as he was leaving the station, met Major Camp-

bell driving up in a great hurry. He was about to salute the little Scotchman and ride on, when he was beckoned to come over and speak to him.

"Is that the train Colonel Langham intended leaving by?" asked the Major—"the one I just now saw leaving the station?"

"Yes," answered Mounteagle, as respectfully as he could bring himself to address "that man"—the name by which he usually designated Campbell—"the Colonel has just gone off in it with Miss Singleton."

"How provoking!" cried the Major. "I had a message I particularly wished to give him, as he could very well have done what I wanted in Brighton; now I shall have to wait till I hear of some one going to London. I daresay I won't have to wait long—do you happen to know of anybody going?"

"No," answered Mounteagle, a happy thought striking him, that he really might as well go and spend the rest of the day there himself. If the Major was anxious about his commission, he might settle about his getting leave, and let him off then and there. "I don't know of any-one going for a day or two," he went on; "but

I would go myself now, to oblige you, if you would just speak to the Adjutant, and say that you had seen me when you go back, and make him give me leave, in case I do not return early to-night. I might stop, and go to the theatre, in which case I shouldn't be here till to-morrow morning; but I'll get back in time for parade."

"Oh! never mind," replied the Major, gathering up his reins, and preparing to drive on; "I wouldn't think of troubling you to go up on my account, but, if you hear of anyone going, let me know." So saying, he turned his horse and drove away, leaving Mounteagle angry and disappointed.

"So much for trying to be civil to that beggar," thought the young man, as he turned his horse's head, and rode back to camp. "I'll tell Clara, when I see her next, how I was treated when I tried to keep my word to her." He took liberties with her name in absence, that he would have been afraid to take had she been by, and he laughed at himself as he noticed it. "After all, why shouldn't I?" he argued. "I have only known her four or five days, certainly; but we are pretty well on in a flirtation already, for all that, and if I really intend going

in for the Colonel's money and his pretty niece together, I must accustom myself to the name I shall have to call her." He laughed a little cynical, disagreeable laugh as he thought thus, and then touching his horse with the spur, galloped back to barracks.

CHAPTER IX.

CLARA, in the meantime, did not feel nearly so light of heart as she had done in the morning, but no one could have told by her face or manner, as she drew her head back from the window after her last glance at Mounteagle, that she was leaving anything she cared about behind her. She had no time to think about pain, if she felt any, for it was necessary she should talk to and amuse her uncle, that he might not think the man she had left on the platform was in any way dearer to her than he ought to be. The struggle was a hard one, and one, moreover, to which she was not at all accustomed. She had never had occasion before to conceal any of her thoughts or actions, and the task of playing a part was difficult and irksome. As they left home behind and approached Brighton, her spirits rose again,

and the need for acting ceased ; she was going into the enchanted region of the new and unknown, that fairy-land that always possesses such an attraction for youthful minds. She was sure to amuse herself, for her friends were gay and pleasant people, and she, who knew little of life but what she had seen in quiet country quarters, had wonderful anticipations of the gaiety of the Brighton season, and of the new scenes in which she was to share.

Her friends were very wealthy people, and had a splendid house in Palmyra Square. Clara thought she had hardly ever seen anything more beautiful than the furniture and appointments of the mansion, when she entered it after her journey. She felt too dirty and dusty to sit down on the satin-covered chairs, or to walk over the velvet carpets, but by degrees the sensation of strangeness wore off, and, before her uncle left that evening, she was quite at home in her new place of abode.

Mrs. Chetwynd was a young and very pretty woman, a brunette, with wonderful eyes like brown velvet, an exquisite brown complexion, not a very great quantity of hair, but what there was of it was beautiful, black as night, and

wavy ; she generally wore it loose, half waved, half curled, the front part drawn back from the face, and fastened at the top of the head with a bow, leaving the ends of the hair to fall in their natural curl over the back. In figure she was small and very slight, quite childlike in appearance, with beautiful little hands and feet. Her husband was a good many years older than herself, but, in spite of that and his wealth, it had really been a love-match, and though they had been more than a year married, they were still as much in love as ever.

“You dear child !” cried Mrs. Chetwynd, when Colonel Langham had started for the station, accompanied by Mr. Chetwynd, “come and sit here by the fire, I am sure you must be cold—I am ; and I want to get well roasted, whilst I am listening to all your adventures, for I’m sure you’ve lots of them to tell.”

“I have none, indeed, I assure you,” laughed the girl. “I waited to have them all down here with you, as I knew they would amuse you.”

“Yes, and I hope you will have plenty here,” answered her friend ; “that’s to say, if they are of a pleasant kind. But I don’t believe that

about your not having anything to tell me now ; you know if adventures come to you, you can't help it, and have no power to put them off from one time to another. You look like a girl who would have a story attached to her, and I think you must have one."

"Oh! but I haven't—I told you so before. If you want to hear anything of that kind from me, I fear you will be sadly disappointed ; besides, you haven't told me a word about yourself yet."

"Well, if you won't, you won't," replied her hostess ; "as to myself, I have lots to tell you, if little trifling bits of fun, and things of that kind amuse you. We are frightfully gay here, and I am sure you will enjoy it. We stop in to-night, there was nothing particular going on, but for every evening during the rest of the week we have engagements, so I hope you have brought lots of dresses."

Clara soon found that the balls and dinners and drums to which she was taken every night, were not half so pleasant to her as she fancied they would have been. She missed something certainly, and at first could not tell what ; but the second evening she was out, a

tall, dark man standing half turned from her at the far end of the room, caused her heart to beat for a minute, and an uncontrollable eagerness to see his face to take possession of her. In another moment he turned towards her, and then, as he revealed a strange face, the disappointment was so great as to tell her at once what it was she had missed since she had been down by the sea-side, and what she had expected that minute to find. Only a haughty, handsome face, known so slightly and yet so well, it was only this she had looked for, only this she had sought vainly—only a deep, low voice breathing strange enigmatical words into her ear—only this had she waited and wearied for—only this had she thought to hear soon again, when she had caught sight of the stranger's tall figure in the distance.

But he for whom she looked was not there, and she understood now why the place had seemed so much more dull to her than it did to others; why the gay chatter of her friend Beatrice pleased her less than in former days; why the homage of those attracted around her by her beauty had no value for her, as it once would have had.

Beatrice Chetwynd often asked people to her house for Clara's especial amusement. It was anything but an amusement to her, as she tried to tell her friend; it bored her to talk to other men when her whole mind was occupied with one in particular; but, on her venturing to call them stupid, and beg that no one might be asked on her account in future, Beatrice Chetwynd exclaimed, with great presence of mind:

"Clara, you must be in love, or else you never could think of calling Captain Gage stupid. He's quite the most entertaining man I know; and any woman who likes to sit by the hour thinking, without saying a word, as you do, must have something very particular to think of. And, if you're in love, you've no business to keep it hidden from me, your chaperon; so, after another fair trial, if you don't pronounce Captain Gage the most charming man you have ever met, as I know he has already pronounced you to be the most charming woman of his acquaintance, I shall consider the charge of love as proved, and write to your mother at once."

"Nonsense," said Clara, trying to laugh naturally; and determined that, in future, she

would flirt outrageously with Captain Gage, or any man that came near her, rather than that it should for one moment be suspected that she had given away her heart where, she much feared, it was in no way wished for. "I am not as great a talker as you," she added, "and I must confess I would often a great deal rather watch the sky and sea than have to invent small talk for people I don't know well enough to like; but if you wish it, and as I suppose it's my duty to society, I'll try and do better on the next occasion."

She had exerted herself very much the next time they were out, trying to make herself agreeable to the before-mentioned Captain Gage, and if he had declared her charming prior to this, he took leave of her that day, thinking her the only woman in the world worth speaking to, while she returned to the house in Palmyra Square by herself, feeling extremely tired and dissatisfied, Mrs. Chetwynd having taken her husband off for some shopping. She had gone upstairs to her room, when a servant knocked at her door, and told her a gentleman had called, and was waiting to see the ladies in the drawing-room.

"Very well," she answered, thinking "he may wait a little longer before he sees me;" but, after a little reflection, her better nature prevailed. "Beatrice would be vexed if I wasn't polite to him while she's out," she thought; and going down, she opened the door and entered the room.

It was almost dusk outside, and in the large drawing-room, with its masses of drapery round the windows, it was quite dark, except where the brilliant fire flung patches of ruddy light on the prominent objects, leaving everything else in deep shadow. The noise she made in opening the door disturbed the occupant of the room; he rose, and looked towards her, thus turning his face from the light. Uncertain whether it was anyone she knew or not, she advanced doubtfully, when he stepped quickly forward, and exclaimed, in a voice she at once recognised :

"Miss Singleton, have you forgotten me and your promise so quickly?"

"Oh! it is you!" she cried, with an unmistakeably joyful accent. "I have not forgotten anything or anyone, but I couldn't see you with your face in the shadow. What

brings you here?—nothing wrong, I hope?”

“Oh! no, they’re all right.” He was still standing before her, holding her hand. “But I found the place so dull after you left, I could endure it no longer, so came down here for a week. I had a little difficulty in getting leave, but your uncle is very kind to me, and we managed it at last.”


“Does he know you are here?” she inquired eagerly, vague hopes springing up in her mind as she asked the question.

“No,” he answered, laughing; but there was more bitterness than merriment in his mirth. “I found out where you were staying accidentally; saw a letter addressed to you on the table, when I was calling there the day before yesterday; so you see I didn’t lose much time coming after you.”

He led her to the sofa as he spoke, made her sit down, and seated himself beside her, looking at her with more real affection than had ever been in his heart for her before, if she had only known it. The fact was he had missed her very much; he admired her extremely, as none could help doing—he enjoyed her conversation, and, above all, he enjoyed flirting with her,

going as far on the road to love-making as he could with safety, and quite capable of overstepping the boundary that divides the safe from the dangerous, if circumstances and the inclination of the moment favoured such folly. He liked to see the bright colour rise to her cheek, and her eyes fall when they met his; she looked so pretty at such times that any man might be excused rash or foolish words. And he was quite sure she liked him a little; so sure that he could not resist the temptation to turn the little liking into a great love, though, in that case, what the ultimate result of his success would be he never troubled himself to think about.

“Have you missed me at all?” he asked, presently, after a short silence, during which pause Clara looked with grave contentment into the fire, and he looked at her. It was an awkward question to answer, for one whose thoughts had really been as much taken up with him as hers had been, and who had no recognised right to allow her mind to dwell on such a subject; therefore she had recourse to silence as the safest reply, and merely looked at him without speaking. Looks say a great deal more



than words sometimes, and in that glance Clara revealed much more of her heart to her companion than she would have been at all willing to believe. As she would not speak, he went on: "You know how I must have wanted you, or I should not be here now."

This was all very interesting, no doubt, to the parties concerned, but Mounteagle had not become so absorbed in his flirtation as to imagine it would be equally so to lookers-on, and hearing Mr. and Mrs. Chetwynd, who had that minute returned, ascending the stairs, he rose, and leaning against the chimney-piece, began an animated account of the last field-day, whilst waiting for their appearance. The next minute they entered the room. Clara introduced her friend, and they were all soon engaged in conversation. There was to be a ball at the Pavilion that night on behalf of some charity, to which the Chetwynds and Clara were going. Mounteagle, immediately he heard their plans, announced his intention of being there also, an arrangement that one, at least, of the party, felt would conduce greatly to her enjoyment of the evening. He took leave presently, but they met late that night at the ball, and it is to be

presumed they saw a good deal of each other there, for Beatrice Chetwynd, towards the close of the evening, remarked to her husband :

“ I am sure there is something going on there, Charlie ; Clara is looking happier and more lively than she has been since she came here—more like her old self, in fact. I couldn’t think what had come over her, she was so altered this time, but now I understand. What do you think of him ? I like him.”

“ Well, as you do,” said Charlie, laughing, “ there isn’t the least good in my giving an opinion, if it differs from yours ; and if the girl has made up her mind, there’s no use in any-one’s saying what he thinks. He seems to me a gentlemanly young fellow, but I don’t get to know any more of him, after talking to him for an hour, than I did after the first five minutes. He’s a good talker, a pleasant companion, but impenetrably reserved, and that’s a kind of character I always mistrust. Where there’s so much concealment, there must be something to conceal,” he concluded, sententiously.

“ I wonder if her mother and uncle know of it ?” continued Mrs. Chetwynd. “ I don’t sup-

pose they do, or else we should have heard something of it."

Notwithstanding which doubt, as Mounteagle parted from them at their carriage-door, she asked him to go and lunch with them next day. Mounteagle accepted the invitation gladly. Fortune seemed favouring his plans in every way; he had had several delightful dances with Clara that evening, had let her see pretty plainly the state of his feelings, or what he, for the present, chose to consider the state of his feelings, and had ascertained a good deal more about hers than she was at all aware of. The excitement of the game was beginning to exercise an influence over him, and he was surprised, several times as he walked home, to find himself thinking of this girl in a more lover-like manner than he had believed it possible he ever could think of any woman but one. He had been playing with edged tools, and was only now beginning to find it out; however, in this case, there was no fear of the edge hurting him, since it was very evident she returned his feelings. Perhaps, if he had not been quite so certain of his power over her, he might have cared more about her, and his after-conduct might have

been different; but the conquest had been too easy, and to a nature like his the certainty of success took away the pleasure he would otherwise have derived from the undertaking.

When they returned home that evening, Beatrice Chetwynd followed Clara into her own room, and, seating herself in an arm-chair before the fire, began :

"I see now, dear, why you found Captain Gage stupid. I was sure there must be something behind such an unusual opinion; and really I don't wonder at your choice, for he seems very nice, and is certainly extremely handsome."

"What nonsense you talk, Beatrice!" cried Clara, pulling the flowers out of her hair hurriedly, and busying herself at the toilet-table, with her back to her friend. "He's very pleasant, and I like him very much,"

"You needn't tell me that," interpolated Beatrice.

"But there's nothing of what you think between us—there couldn't be. I'm ever so much older than he is, so that it would be impossible we should have any idea of the kind."

"You don't look it, dear," answered Beatrice Chetwynd, lazily, "and so that goes for nothing;

besides, I always believe my eyes, and I've seen quite enough to-night to tell me he'll ask Charlie's or my leave to propose to you before you are many days older."

"How can you be so absurd?" replied Clara, turning round and laughing heartily; for, from what she had seen of him, she guessed truly that would be about the very last course he would be likely to pursue; and the funny, babyish face and figure of Mrs. Chetwynd, as she leaned back in her chair half asleep, made the idea appear still more ludicrous to her. "Why, you foolish child," she said, "the idea of asking you! I look at least twice as old as you, and far more fit to chaperon you than you to chaperon me."

"Well, I'm too sleepy to dispute the point, but it will be very wrong if he doesn't do as I say," answered the little lady, rising and going off, leaving Clara to sleep as well as she could, for dreaming of the pleasures of the night past, and those that her heart promised her on the morrow.

When Mounteagle appeared at the house in Palmyra Square next day, he was at once shown into the drawing-room, where Clara was seated

alone working. She greeted him with a shy, bright smile, and told the servant to tell Mrs. Chetwynd Mr. Mounteagle had called. But minutes passed away, and still the little lady did not make her appearance, being firmly persuaded she was doing a very wise thing in leaving the lovers together. In the meantime, Mounteagle's looks and words had both become very embarrassing to Clara, who lost her presence of mind, from the fact of her feelings being too deeply engaged, and became unable to fence with or parry his meaning words.

"Well, there is no good in beating about the bush any longer," he said, at length; "you must know, at least, that I love you."

She looked down, and her face became thoughtful; but she answered nothing—indeed, she didn't see that any answer was required of her.

"You don't believe me, I see," he went on, after a few minutes' pause. "I know I can never hope to marry you; there are causes that would prevent your uncle's ever allowing our marriage, even if you cared for me; but now it is evident I shall be the only sufferer in the matter. I was a fool ever to be deceived by

you! Like all the rest of your sex, you lead a man on with sweet smiles and gentle words, and then, when, emboldened by encouragement, he ventures to hope that he has won your love, you turn round and freeze him with the sight of your coldness, and your anger at his presumption."

For a minute Clara was staggered at the accusation thus brought against her; she could not return any reply to his avowal of his love, he had required none; but of this she was confident, she had not encouraged him in any way, from the consequences of which she wished to draw back; she was sure that she had not done so, and her spirit rising at the injustice of the accusation, she made answer:

"I don't know what you mean by saying I led you on, and then turned round on you; I have been friendly and kind to you always, I will be so now if you will let me; I have never shown you coldness, nor thought your conduct presumption."

"You are right, and I was not speaking the truth in saying what I did," he replied, humbly; "but I am half mad at times, when I see the utter hopelessness of my love for you, I can't

explain to you why it is so ; ask your uncle, and perhaps he will tell you, for he knows all about it—as for me, I cannot.” He tried to take her hand as he spoke, but she drew it from him quickly. There was a sore, painful feeling at her heart, that this man she loved so well was not acting fairly by her ; and yet, the next minute, she accused herself of being hard-hearted, cruelly sceptical, as he put his hand before his face with something very like a groan. “It is my own fault,” he muttered, after a pause, during which she watched him with pitying eyes ; “I should never have come near you, knowing how it must end—above all, I should never have let you see it ; but it seemed to me it would be so much easier to bear the parting that must come, if I thought you would feel ever so little grieved for it also. I thought you cared for me ; I see I was wrong. No woman has ever loved me,” he added, bitterly, a remembrance of Ethel Courtenay flashing across his mind.

“Don’t say that,” murmured Clara, the exceeding bitterness of his tone touching her tender heart, and believing it was for her sake his tone was so bitter. “It is not so bad as you

think; I care for you a great deal, as your true friend. I shall be sorry to part from you—you believe that, don't you?"

"I don't know whether I do or not," he answered, sullenly; "or if I do, that's not what I want, and you know it. However, perhaps it is not your fault; I cannot ask you for more than a friend's affection, because I can never hope to be more to you, and with that I suppose I must content myself. It's an empty thing to content oneself with," he added, with a faint smile; "it's like giving a stone to a hungry person, and yet I daresay it's more than I deserve. But we shall remember each other always—shall we not?—according to your old promise. I shall hold you to that."

"Yes, always," she answered, giving him her hand on the new compact, as she had once given it on the old, and tears, whether of pain or pleasure she knew not, rising to her eyes, though her strong proud will held them back, and would not let them fall.

He looked at her for a minute or two, retaining her white, soft hand in his; perhaps he was calculating how far he might go without the risk of losing his power over her, perhaps he

really cared more for her than he thought, but after a minute's silence he whispered, "In token of my friendship and allegiance—there is no harm in it," and, raising her hand to his lips, he kissed it. She started and drew it away hastily, exclaiming :

"I did not mean you to do that."

"I could not help it," he answered. "I am going; forgive my first and last offence. May I not write to you sometimes, until I see you again?"

"Yes, but I cannot promise to answer. Good-bye."

One more look in his face, one more pressure of the hand, and he was gone; and Clara, going back to her chair, sat down and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER X.

SOME time after the meeting recorded in the last chapter, Clara, in answer to repeated letters from her mother, all demanding her return, wrote to say she would be back at Aldershot by the end of the week. She did not feel as much elated at the prospect of her return home as she would have done a short time before; she had heard two or three times from Mounteagle, and had written to him once, a carefully-worded, friendly, chatty letter, in which there was not one word that could make the most suspicious person imagine they were on anything but ordinarily friendly terms. The last time he wrote to her, a few days before she announced her intention of returning, he had told her that he was being sent away on detachment duty, and should not therefore be in the camp when she came back. He was

going under the command of Captain Morton, and was not as likely to get into trouble as if he had been under any of the other officers; altogether she thought his letter seemed written in better spirits than he ought to have been in, considering the news it contained.

Mrs. Chetwynd had asked once or twice after Mounteagle, and was very much surprised at his sudden departure; she put it down to a cause that was decidedly far from the truth, though appearances, no doubt, justified her in that belief. Her husband laughed at her about it, saying :

“ You remember, Beatrice, your telling me he was going in for her, and that she liked him ? You were right in the first part of your guess, I think, but not in the second, as it is evident she must have refused him.”

“ Oh ! I hope not,” cried Mrs. Chetwynd. “ He was such a fine-looking man, and I am sure he must have been nice, since he had the good sense to appreciate her; I had so few occasions of speaking to him, I couldn’t very well tell what he was like.”

“ No, and you would not have known much more about him had you seen him longer,”

answered her husband. "But he was a delightful man to talk to, and as good company as one could wish to meet."

When Clara went home, her uncle overwhelmed her with praises for the wonderful change she had wrought in his subordinate.

"He actually was civil to the Major, and I think him a very nice fellow. He is wonderfully popular with the younger officers, and with the men of the regiment also, and indeed with all who are not placed in a position of authority over him. That anyone has power to command him, seems to be the touchy point with him; if he was at the top of the tree himself, I have no doubt he would do very well, and even be beloved by his subordinates. He's off on detachment duty with Morton; there is some disturbance going on in D——shire, and several detachments from our regiment are quartered about there in different directions. Morton is the only man he will obey quietly, therefore I was very glad he happened to be in his company."


"He was down at Brighton with us for a few days, uncle; didn't I tell you that in my letters?"

"No, indeed, child; I never remember hearing anything about it, and I am sure if you had told either your mother or myself, I should have remembered it."

"It must have gone out of my head," she answered, hurriedly. "He was with us only for a day or two, and I did not write to you from the time he arrived, until after he left; at any rate," she added carelessly, "whether I told you or not, he was there, though he didn't stay long—only three or four days, I think."

Her uncle looked at her curiously, but she seemed quite calm and cool; there could be nothing concealed, he was sure, and satisfied of that, he turned to another subject.

In the meantime, Clara awaited, with a little anxiety, the answer to her letter. She had been very cautious in what she said and how she expressed herself—would he think it too cold and stiff, be disgusted with her, and not reply? She almost feared this would be the case, for a week or more had elapsed since he must have received her letter, and still he had not answered. He had told her in so many words that he loved her, and though she was well aware that a young man's love is,




with few exceptions, a very fickle feeling, still she would not think that in so very short a time he could have been charmed by some new beauty into forgetting all the passionate acts and words of a few weeks ago.

A day or two after her return, she did hear from him. It was a short note, not much more than a few lines, breathing a spirit of discontent at being exiled to the hateful wilds of D—shire, when he might have been enjoying the society of friends at Aldershot. He was moping and wretched, he said, his only solace being the society of some people of the name of Courtenay, who resided near, and who were very civil to all the officers of the detachment, but more particularly to Captain Morton and himself. But for them he did not know what they should do, and for want of anything of interest to tell her, he ended a short and stupid letter. Anything but stupid to Clara, though far too short; that was a fault indeed, but the depressed, discontented spirit he showed was, in her eyes, just what it was natural he should feel when separated from her, after the sentiments he had avowed the last time they met. She was quite satisfied and joyful, going

about the house all day afterwards with a face radiant from secret happiness and contentment; a happiness that was all the greater to her rather reserved nature because she might keep it to herself.

Late in the afternoon her feelings received a severe shock, during a visit paid to her mother and herself by Mr. Matthews, who our readers may remember had been on detachment with Morton and Slingsby at the time Mounteagle joined. He was now in another company, and consequently had not gone away with the others, but he had just received a letter from Slingsby, who was with them, and he was in a high state of excitement about the news he had to impart.

"Slingsby tells me," he said, after a few preliminary remarks, "that Mounteagle is going in very hard for a Miss Courtenay, whose father has a splendid place quite close to Merriton." Clara started a little at the name of Courtenay, and became much more attentive than she had at first been to Matthew's gossip. "The best of it is," continued the visitor, with a laugh, "it seems Morton is tremendous spoons on the same girl; that must be rather a complication,



and I should like to see it working out. Which would you back to win, Miss Singleton?"

As Matthews addressed this question to her, he turned towards her, and Clara had barely time to put on a faint smile to hide her distress of mind, before his eyes were upon her. With an effort she answered :

"I am not in the habit of betting, Mr. Matthews; and even were I, I know so little of either of the gentlemen engaged in this matter that I could have no opinion. Mr. Mounteagle is, I think, the finest-looking man."

"Yes, and that goes a long way with the ladies," replied the little Lieutenant; "notwithstanding which I would back Morton, if the girl was a nice one, but, from what Slingsby says, I am only surprised so sensible a man as Morton has been caught. He says she is very beautiful—one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen, he thought her, when he saw her first; but though clever and intelligent, she is heartless, and, what may seem strange, mindless also, being quite taken up with her dress and her conquests."


"He speaks hardly of her," answered Clara, an impulse of justice tempting her to stand up

for the absent; "she may not be so bad as he thinks. Can she have offended him in any way?"

"Indeed she may, in one way," replied Matthews; "if, as I daresay was the case, he liked her himself, and she wouldn't flirt with him. But, of course, he wouldn't allow that."

Would that little man, with his endless flow of small talk, never leave them? thought Clara, wearily, as he sat on for half an hour longer, gossiping about everything and everybody in the camp, to the great delight of Mrs. Singleton, and the unutterable annoyance of her daughter, who wanted to get upstairs alone, and think over what she had just heard, comparing it with the letter received that morning. But Mrs. Singleton enjoyed her little dish of gossip just as well as the most strait-laced maiden lady in a retired country town, or some well got-up and would-be young frequenter of the London clubs. She therefore encouraged the little man, asking him questions and leading him on, until he was thoroughly pumped dry, when he suddenly remembered he had other visits to pay, and, rising, took his leave.

"A most charming young man," remarked



Clara's mother, as soon as the door had closed behind him; "and one whose acquaintance is well worth cultivating."

"An odious, backbiting little viper!" was Clara's mental comment, as she ran upstairs; but justice to the individual compels us to state that the mean between the two diverse opinions was in this case, as in most others, the true one.

When Clara got to her room, and sat down to consider calmly the two contradictory pieces of information she had that day received, her mind was in such a state of bewilderment, from the pain of jealousy and disappointed love, that she could hardly reflect reasonably on the matter. She took his letter, and re-read it many times; certainly it did mention the Courtenays—said they had been kind to him, and that without them, away from her, life would be miserable to him. There was comfort in that, at least, that her absence afflicted him. He did not mention there being any young lady in the family, but this omission might proceed from two causes: either because his heart being taken up with another, she was insignificant to him, even though she was not so to anyone

else; or because he was as faithless as he was accused of being, and feared to let her discover it. Which of these two surmises was the correct one? She could not for a long time decide, but after going over the two sides of the question again and again, that which she knew only by hearsay faded more and more from her mind, and that which she held in black and white before her prevailed.

No doubt if the family were kind to him, and the young lady admired him, as Clara knew she must do, the report had arisen without fault on his side; which was clearly proved by his having thought so little of the matter as not even to have mentioned the young lady's name. She would not allow herself to suspect him of a breach of faith, so short a time after she had heard his loving words, and received his promise that they should remember each other always—a promise which meant a great deal more to her than he had ever intended it should mean to him.

With him it was a mere formula, signifying that as long as it was pleasant or convenient to him, or as long as he might hope to make anything by the connection, he would keep her

green in his memory, place none before her in his imagination; afterwards, when convenience suited, or some one more charming turned up, they should still be friends, if she would consent to such an arrangement, but on a different footing—as mere acquaintances are friendly when they meet in society. At any rate, it would not be he who would sever the bond between them in words, though, in the spirit of the compact, he held himself bound to nothing.

With her it signified something widely different, something that to her steadfast, thoughtful nature might be possible, but that to his would have seemed extravagant and absurd. It signified to her that though circumstances stronger than their love (he had told her this was the case) would keep them apart in life, still they were to be one in heart always, considering in every action whether it would be for the good or meet the approval of the other dearer self, from whom fate kept each one separated. It was a Quixotic and unworldly idea, but she had the faith and the strength in her to accomplish it, if he should prove true to his share of it; if not—— what the consequences would be, what struggles would agitate her mind before she

succeeded in delivering herself from her bondage, she never considered. That he should not always remain faithful in every way, her knowledge of human nature generally made her think possible; acts do not always show the workings of the heart, and he might, for worldly advantage, be false in something outwardly; but that his inward feelings towards her could change greatly, she could not and would not believe.

Her high spirits were sobered, however; the evening was not as bright as the morning had been, though she kept a brave heart, and would not doubt till he himself should be his accuser. It needed courage and high faith to come to this resolution, for doubts had been stirred up in her mind, and, to one who loved as she did, uncertainty and jealous fears were more painful than any knowledge that all was over between them could have been. Then she would have schooled her heart to submit, and bear the lot in life that had been appointed her—a lot that falls to so many others in this great and busy world, that she, one solitary, lonely item, would have no right to repine against it. Yes, when she thought how much more bitter were the

trials of some—when she reflected that, in this sorrowful life, those who suffer can never say they are the most tried, there being always others somewhere in the world whose misery, if it were known, would equal or eclipse theirs—when she thought of all this, and of her own unclouded happiness until the present hour, she felt that she had no right to expect more prosperity than those around ; and though, had she dared, she would fain have cried, “any trial but this, any sorrow rather than the one that threatens me,” she knew she ought not to rebel, she must take her place, if need be, with those others in the world who had bowed beneath a similar grief before her.

But the uncertainty was what chafed and galled her ; with the prospect of intense happiness before her on the one hand, and intense sorrow on the other, going blindfold between the two, not knowing towards which her path diverged, she felt it beyond her strength to be calm and resigned. In society, amongst other people, she could wear her mask bravely, and was no whit behind others in acting the drama of life ; but in the solitude of her own room, with no company but her own wild, passionate, untamed


youthful heart, she fought with the doubts that would arise, sometimes conquering them in the struggle, but retiring from the conflict always wounded and overwrought.

While she was learning thus, by sore and cruel experience, what the battle of life may be when one's own heart has taken part against one, Mounteagle, away in D—shire, was passing his time much in the manner Slingsby had intended to describe when he said Mounteagle was going in for Miss Courtenay. When sent with the detachment to Merriton, he was not in the least aware the Courtenays were living anywhere near. As has before been stated, Mr. Courtenay was a man of enormous wealth, and being the possessor of two magnificent country places, generally spent a portion of every year at each. As soon as the detachment came to Merriton he called, and recognising Herbert's name, left a few lines pencilled on one of the cards (they were all out except Slingsby, who, for some reason, did not choose to show himself), asking him to come to dinner next evening, and bring with him any of his brother-officers, who would excuse ceremony, and come on such an invitation. As

soon as Mounteagle had read the message, it flashed through his mind that he would not care to introduce all his companions to Ethel Courtenay. There were many among them with far longer purses, if with less pleasing exteriors than he possessed, and he had long ago made up his mind that money was the qualification necessary to win Mr. Courtenay's heiress. Slingsby and Morton, therefore, were the two whom he selected to accompany him next day to The Park, as the Courtenays' place was called; and when he was questioned as to the members of the family, their sex, age, and appearance, he carefully avoided any allusions to the young heiress's beauty; it was quite enough those fellows should know she was the only child to set them all after her, and, as to her appearance, they would find out all about that only too quickly.

Slingsby was both poor and plain—there was no danger, therefore, from him, reasoned the calculating subaltern; and Morton, though a good-looking fellow enough, was not a ladies' man, as Mounteagle well knew, and quite above the meanness of running after a woman for her money. They arrived at The Park at

the appointed time to a minute, and found the family, consisting of Mr. Courtenay, Ethel, and an elderly maiden aunt, a sister of Mr. Courtenay's, assembled in the drawing-room. There were one or two other people also, old country fogies, but with them Mounteagle was not acquainted; he shook hands with his friends, introduced his comrades, and then tried to get a few words quietly with Ethel before dinner was announced. But in this attempt he was disappointed; she was too much taken up with her duties as hostess, talking to the county magnates, to pay any attention to him, and he drew back into a corner, indignant at the cool manner in which she had put him aside, and comparing her mentally with Clara Singleton, whose sweet, bright face and dark grey eyes rose before him at that minute. Clara certainly did not possess Miss Courtenay's sparkling coquettish manner, nor could she flash such a bewildering dazzling glance out of her deep soft eyes, as fell upon him just then from Ethel's bronze golden ones. As he caught the look and answered it, all thought of comparison vanished from his mind, his anger faded away, and the old infatuation rushed over him with tenfold greater force, that



he saw what utter hopeless folly it was letting her perceive it.


"I must and will keep out of her way," he thought; "she would deceive me as completely now as she did then, and would be just as pitiless. Why hasn't she got a heart like that other woman?—or is Clara the only one of her kind in the world? It seems like it, from all I have seen of them, and I suppose I ought to think myself a lucky fellow, for I could have her if I chose, in spite of uncle and mother and everybody; and yet I care more for this coquette's little finger than for the whole heart and soul of the only good and true woman I know. Human nature, I suppose; but as Major Campbell said to me once, what do we want with nature, its day is past, and in our time it mars wherever it interferes."

He laughed cynically as he thought thus. It amused him to take up Major Campbell's words, and apply them in a sense the worthy though irascible Scotchman had never dreamt of their bearing. Then he turned to see if he could discover on their countenances what impression his Queen of Beauty had made on his comrades. To Slingsby he glanced first of all. From that

poor youth's own confession about Miss Singleton, Mounteagle suspected him of being impressionable, and he was already disposed to be jealous of the attentions he was fully convinced the plain but popular Ensign would show her. To his astonishment Slingsby was not contemplating the vision of loveliness with open-mouthed astonishment, nor, though standing close to her, was he listening to what she said.

He was engaged in what was evidently a pleasant conversation with an elderly young lady, the daughter of one of the county magnates, whose broad forehead and bright eyes denoted a keen and quick intelligence, which her attempt at juvenility rather belied.

"Fancy that idiot flirting with Miss Featherhead, when Ethel Courtenay is in the room! Perhaps it's only a blind, however," he thought, as he detected Slingsby directing a keen searching glance at the young hostess, who was laughing merrily at some witty speech of her companion's. Satisfied that this conclusion was the right one, he looked round for Morton, whom he presently discovered seated in a corner behind the table, a photographic album



before him, and his eyes fixed with a strange intensity on Ethel's brilliant face and form, as she stood near the fireplace, talking to an old lady, evidently a person of importance, with a happy blending of the veneration due to old age and the gaiety consonant with her looks and character. After a time Morton seemed to become aware that his conduct was singular, for he turned away with an effort, and opened the album with an unmistakeable sigh.

"He's struck, at any rate," soliloquised Mouteagle, at first thinking of Morton's fate with undisguised satisfaction; then, remembering that he would be a rival, and perhaps a dangerous one, he became slightly less contented, and felt well pleased when at that moment the door was thrown open, and the butler announced that dinner was served.

Mouteagle was certainly not wrong when he thought Morton was struck; that was exactly the word to express the feeling that had taken possession of the upright and simple-minded Captain. He really never had seen any woman yet who had exerted much influence over him, or caused him to feel more than very


slightly in love. Of course of passing fancies he had had several, but they were very fleeting, and had left no impression on his heart or on his life. He had become so accustomed to this state of things that he had begun to consider himself invulnerable, and also to think it was some infirmity of will or judgment that rendered other men such slaves to a passion that he found very easy to control. When he entered the drawing-room at The Park that night, and his eyes first fell on Ethel Courtenay, it was as if a sudden revelation had been made to him with regard to his own nature. For the first time it seemed to him possible the will might not always be strong enough to control the heart; for the first time he acknowledged there might be a woman in the world who should have so much power to sting and wound men's inner lives that they would be content to let future and career in the outer world be blighted, if, by so doing, they could dull thought, or drive the remembrance of the destroyer from them. For the first time a vague feeling, a dread almost that there might be a possibility of so loving, dawned within him and disturbed him. What if it should be so, and

being so, what if his love should be lavished in vain?—for, to those who feel as he was beginning to believe he might be able to feel, the danger of being deceived is generally greater than the probability of finding one worthy of so much devotion. He was thinking thus when Mounteagle noticed him first, with his eyes fixed on Ethel Courtenay's face, and it was as he thought how little chance he had of winning what he feared, in spite of all his efforts, he would dare to love, that he turned away with a sigh at the hopelessness of what lay before him, and began to examine the album on the table.

After dinner a game of cross purposes commenced, which Slingsby, who was sharp enough at putting things together, understood and appreciated. Morton, attracted irresistibly towards his young hostess, engaged her in conversation, which Mounteagle, who had made up his mind to keep aloof from her, did not attempt to interrupt, but retired into a corner behind Ethel's chair, from whence he glowered at his Captain from under his bent dark brows, with a scowl that would have astonished that gentleman had he perceived it. But he did not; he

was too deeply occupied in drinking in every look and tone of the enchantress who had usurped such complete dominion over him; whilst she, though never forgetting or ceasing for a minute to make herself agreeable, was, in truth, extremely put out by his persistent attention. She had by no means intended, when she so quietly snubbed and put aside Herbert Mount-eagle at the beginning of the evening, to drop her little flirtation in that quarter, but she fancied he was so completely at her beck and call that she could take him up and put him down again whenever she chose, and was now both annoyed and surprised when she found he avoided her. He had improved since she saw him last; he was quite the finest-looking man in the room, or indeed anywhere about that part of the country; it would indeed be aggravating should he free himself from her dominion, as it now seemed likely he might.

Full of these thoughts, she turned round once or twice to see where he had placed himself; and at length, when Miss Featherhead's progress to the piano gave her an excuse for moving, she went over to the table near which he was standing, and with an easy and perfectly



natural manner, said : " Really, Mr. Mount-eagle, you seem to have forgotten me. You have not come to ask me after any of your old friends, whose welfare ought to interest you."


" Who are they?" he asked, with freezing politeness. " I remember no friend save one, and I was not quite sure that she desired to be remembered."

She coloured a little, and certainly looked the most embarrassed of the two, as she answered, rather nervously :

" Perhaps I was wrong in claiming your friendship for them ; acquaintances they certainly were. I allude to Blackbird, my horse, and dear old Cæsar, the Newfoundland, of whom you used to be so fond."

" Yes, he was a friend," he replied, brightening up ; " more faithful, I doubt not, than most others. I shouldn't wonder, if he was here now, that he would be glad to see me."

His manner was decidedly the reverse of pleasing—indeed there was a decided touch of insolence in his last words, that nettled the girl to whom he was speaking. She forgot that he was an older and wiser man than when she



last saw him ; she failed to recognise the deep-laid scheme on which he was acting, she only felt that her empire over him was weakened, and she resolved to regain it at all hazards. With this view she exerted herself to be agreeable to him, trying all the old wiles that had formerly never failed of their effect, but was rebuffed and repulsed everywhere.

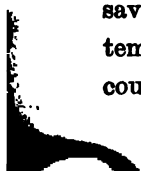
The truth was, Mounteagle had perceived her looking for him once or twice, when she did not see him ; he had seen that she came across the room on purpose to seek him, and he felt that the cause of her extreme and unusual affability to him now was his evident avoidance of her society. All this, which was easy enough for him to read, formed a revelation to him of the course he ought to pursue, if he wished to gain the heart of this proud beauty, as he had, in a far different way—but he would not think of that he determined, for, little sensitive though his conscience was, he could not remember Clara Singleton at this minute without self-reproach. But, after all, what was she, that she should stand between him and this woman, so immeasurably her superior in beauty, wit, intellect, everything ; for Mounteagle took Ethel's quick-

ness of repartee, and general knowledge of the topics of interest of the day, as betokening a brilliancy of mind beyond the average, whereas any moderately-acute observer would quickly have discovered her cleverness was but superficial. No, he had gained the key to the way in which he must obtain the mastery over her who had enslaved him; and that mastery he was determined to obtain, no matter what obstacles should lie in his way, and without regard to the means by which they must be surmounted.

In pursuance of the plan that flashed through his mind for gaining his object, as soon as he had made this discovery, he turned to the piano the minute politeness to Miss Courtenay would allow him, and appeared totally engrossed by Miss Featherhead's music. She sang well and with expression—it was one of her strong points—and the pleasure he evinced in listening to her was not all feigned, though, had he followed the dictates of his inclination, he would much rather have been talking to the disappointed beauty standing beside him, watching her pretty tricks and wiles, all exerted for his benefit—drinking in every silver tone of her

voice, every musical note in her laughter. But in the plan he had formed, the principal feature of the programme was that he should deny himself this pleasure, except at rare intervals, in order that he might persuade the woman he loved that he no longer cared for her, and so pique and interest her in his conquest that she might lose her heart in attempting to regain his. The scheme, as regarded her, was a good one, and showed that he had studied her character to some purpose; with very many girls it would have had a totally opposite effect from that which he hoped it would have with her, but he was tolerably certain of the person with whom he had to deal, before venturing on such a course.

After waiting for a minute or two, and at the close of Miss Featherhead's song, addressing a few observations to her old lover, which received very curt answers, Ethel turned away, and moving across the room, addressed herself to Slingsby. "Now she is going to make a fool of him," thought Mounteagle, watching her savagely, with an expression of such fierce, ill-temper in his face that more than one of the county people noticed it, and commented on



it afterwards, when talking over the evening in their respective families. Slingsby, who had not been specially attracted by Miss Courtenay, his heart being a very true one, and at that time much taken up with Clara Singleton, was surprised when she came over and addressed him so pleasantly. He entered into conversation willingly and freely, as he always did, no matter who the person addressing him might be; it was this general amiability that made him such a favourite in society. His pleasant, lively, good-natured talk speedily drew Ethel's mind from the rebuff she had just received, and she continued in animated conversation with him for some time, Mounteagle every minute growing more and more savage as he saw how the young fellow's easy, unaffected manner interested the woman whom he would have wished to feel interested in none but him.

"I'll break that young fool's head for him, if he doesn't take care," he thought, as he saw that, after one of Slingsby's original speeches, their eyes met, and they laughed with mutual understanding and appreciation. He couldn't stand that state of things much longer, and would, in a few minutes more, have gone over

and interrupted their *tête-à-tête*, in spite of his determination to hold himself aloof from her, when Miss Featherhead, who had followed up the song by playing a lively, rattling piece of music, got up from the piano, and moved towards the table where they were standing. Then Slingsby made way for her to get back to her seat, and leaving the brilliant beauty by whom Mounteagle had supposed he was already fascinated, he attached himself once more to the other lady, who was both elderly and without any claims to good looks, though, from her style of dress, it was evident she did not herself think so. To say the truth, Slingsby's honest nature, already prejudiced in favour of a more noble character, detected at once the taint of falseness that must inevitably be present in the mind of a coquette and flirt, such as Ethel Courtenay, no matter how estimable her other mental qualities might be. He was pleased with her attention, thought her very beautiful and very charming, but——there he stopped; he could not put into words or explain what it was about her that was unsympathetic to him, but he felt it all the same, and it at once put him beyond the reach of danger from her, and made

him turn to plain, elderly Miss Featherhead with satisfaction ; for her he comprehended thoroughly, and while he might smile at some of her oddities, he could not but appreciate the foundation of common sense mixed with strong artistic feeling underlying them.

Mounteagle didn't understand it at all. It was plainly to be seen that it was Slingsby had broken off the conversation by his movement to accommodate Miss Featherhead ; and besides, Miss Courtenay turned away with a more perplexed and annoyed expression than was often seen on her beautiful face. It did not remain there long, for Morton, who had been watching his opportunity, was already at her side ; and before Mounteagle had time to reconsider his determination, they were deep in conversation—a conversation that presently grew too profound for Miss Courtenay ; she was a good talker on superficial subjects, but Morton was a deep thinker, and when set going on any subject, was apt to forget that his companion might not be of the same mental calibre as himself. Ethel Courtenay had the sense and the politeness to appear to listen and understand, taking good care to make few original remarks, and those

she made only where she was sure of her ground—a mode of procedure that confirmed Captain Morton still more in the good opinion he had formed of her, and caused her aunt, who was sitting near, to exclaim suddenly :

“ I am sure, Ethel, I never knew you were so sensible before. I wish you’d give us a little more of it here at home, and not keep those dirty pets that you’re always filling the house with—dogs and birds, and such vermin.”

Ethel’s only answer was a smile at her aunt, sweet enough to have disarmed any adversary but a strict maiden lady, the pink of propriety and tidiness ; she appeared but little mollified by the look, though she contented herself with a grunt, instead of answering as she felt disposed to do. As for the girl, there was a merry twinkle in her eye, as she looked at Morton and changed the conversation, that seemed to say, “ We will resume that subject at another time ; at present, while she is near, we had better not.” The secret understanding which that meaning glance seemed to establish between herself and him, pleased the Captain, and riveted still closer the chains in which he was already bound.

Though old Miss Courtenay spoke no more then, it was not because she did not watch and listen to what was going on, for, as soon as all the company had taken their leave, she turned to her niece, and said :

“I suppose you are going to make a fool of that nice-looking man to whom you were doing the sensible and appreciative listener just now ? It's a pity for him, though how he can be deceived by you I can't imagine, as his sense is real, not make-believe ; but, for all that, I suppose you will succeed with him, as with others. In my day it was not so ; men liked a woman to have both brains and heart, besides beauty, but all that is changed now.”

“That accounts for no man having taken pity upon you, aunt,” answered Ethel, rudely and pertly. She did not take the trouble to hide her real disposition from her family ; and, besides, it was a pleasure to her sometimes to be able to give her aunt a good rap over the knuckles. There was a chronic feud between them, that nothing, not even self-interest, could appease or allay, and it rarely happened that Ethel found herself in a position which forced her to show the elder woman any consideration.

"Well," continued Miss Courtenay, "I have taken a fancy to that young man, and if I see you beguiling him, with the intention of throwing him away like an old glove when you get tired of him, I shall certainly warn him against you. It is a pity his life should be blighted, as you have been the means of blighting so many others."

"Aunt, by your own confession I'm only a means. *Che sarà, sarà*, and if it is decreed he shall suffer by Ethel Courtenay, by Ethel Courtenay he will suffer, and no blame to her that I can see. But really I wish you wouldn't stop to preach me sermons at this hour; I shall lose all my beauty sleep, a thing I am very particular about, and can by no means afford to do without."

So saying, the young lady took up her candle and walked off, kissing her father as she passed him in a cold, careless fashion, but not even deigning to say good night to her irritated aunt.

"Really, Henry, that girl of yours will worry me to death some day," she remonstrated, as soon as the offender had left the room.

"Well, my dear, it's your own fault," was

his placid response ; “ why do you interfere with her ? ”

“ That’s just like you, Henry ; you’d let that girl go to the bad altogether for want of a little judicious correction, and then when the natural consequence of your own over-indulgence displeased you, you would never forgive her. Don’t you notice how impertinent and disrespectful she is to anyone who tries to correct her, and what a disagreeable flirting manner she has with gentlemen ? ”

“ Stuff and nonsense, Caroline ! Her manners are charming—just those natural to a young and excessively pretty girl, so much admired as she is. I can tell you, no daughter of mine will ever forget, or allow others to forget, who she is ; could such a thing happen, I would wash my hands of her for ever. But Ethel may safely be trusted, and I think your worrying the child too much where it is quite unnecessary, is the cause of the disrespectful manner you complain of. When I see cause to interfere, I shall most assuredly do so ; and, until then, I beg you will leave the girl alone, and bring no more of your disputes with her to me.”

So saying, Mr. Courtenay took up his bed-chamber candle and departed, leaving Miss Courtenay still standing before the fire, utterly confounded and silenced by her brother's uncompromising championship of his daughter.

She ought to have known, by this time, what to expect as the result of any appeal to Mr. Courtenay against her niece, and in general she was prudent enough to avoid useless complaints, but on this occasion her indignation got the better of her discretion. She knew that girl would come to a bad end, she muttered, at length, whilst going round to all the shutters and trying the fastenings; after which she took the coals one by one out of the grate, and put them underneath. These two performances, repeated by Miss Courtenay every night, with praiseworthy regularity, were regarded by her as preventives, the one against thieves, the other against fire. This done, she took her candle, and after locking the drawing-room door, as another precaution against robbers, made her way to her own room, pausing for a minute outside Ethel's door, and trying to discover any ray of light that might betray whether the inmate had already retired to rest

or not. While she was endeavouring to satisfy her mind on this subject, the door suddenly opened, and Ethel came out, a vision of beauty in her blue dressing-gown, and with her long hair floating in wonderful profusion over her shoulders; but to her aunt Caroline she was anything but a beautiful sight. The old lady was a little ashamed of having been caught watching outside her niece's door, and she knew that, if Ethel chose to complain to her father, she would get into trouble about it. To her eyes, therefore, the girl's radiant loveliness took the form of a tormenting apparition, and she would willingly have passed on rapidly, pretending that her stoppage had been momentary and accidental, when her niece seized her by the shoulder, and speaking sharply and decisively, said :

“Now, Aunt Caroline, I have had enough of this, and I won't suffer it any longer; if you persist in watching me, as I know you have done lately, either you or I must leave, and I think I can guess which it will be that is likely to go. I am quite competent to take care of myself, and will not permit you to act duenna and spy on all my movements. I daresay

you'd like now to come in and see what I've been doing, but I don't intend you should. I trust your rest will not be disturbed by your remaining in ignorance of my occupation, for even if it were, you would know no more about what keeps me up than you do at present. I have the happiness to wish you a very good night." With which mocking speech Ethel entered her room, shut the door, and returned to her former amusement, which had been so suddenly interrupted by hearing her aunt pause outside.

The fact of the matter was, she was reclining in a comfortable chair before the fire reading a novel, and had only made a mystery of the matter, that she might the better aggravate her aunt, who, quite dumbfounded at the suddenness and completeness of her detection, had fled to her room as soon as she was released, and there, in the cold and discomfort which she considered conducive to health, foreboded many awful events which would be drawn down on her niece by her heartless and headstrong conduct.

The poor old woman certainly had hard times occasionally, though very frequently it was

her own fault, as she was grievously addicted to managing other people's affairs for them, without in the least troubling herself to find out whether they wished for her interference or not. Now, as she stood shivering in the cold whilst disrobing herself for the night (for it was one of her peculiarities that she would have no fire in her room), her anxiety for Ethel's future was not altogether without foundation. The girl's mother had died when she was only three years of age, and since then a systematic course of over-indulgence had fostered every evil quality in her nature, and though she had not originally a bad disposition, her character, never really amiable, had now developed into one that was at all times selfish, exacting, and overhearing.

Her heartlessness had, up to this period, been her safeguard; she had had flirtations innumerable, had been the cause of unhappiness to many a gallant spirit, and had never felt her pulse beat quicker, or her heart throb with pity, for any of the misery she inflicted. She could not even be said to be fond of her father, who spoiled her so persistently, but she quite appreciated the advantage of being in his

favour, and lavished the semblance of intense affection upon him—an affection, however, that never allowed his interests to stand in the way of hers, upon any pretext whatever. As might be expected, such a character had no friends—indeed, did not desire any; women friends she was wont to think might be in the way, no matter how plain she chose them, and as for male friends, why she would rather have them lovers, and that they all were, without her having to take any trouble; in the other case, she would have to submit to constant fault-finding from those who thought they could reform her character, and who might even be so presumptuous as to fancy she could be improved thereby.

That she might be improved, she admitted to herself as possible, for she had one good point in keeping with the fearlessness of her nature, and her disregard of the opinions of those around her, and this was truthfulness to herself, and, where it did not threaten to interfere with her amusements, to others also. She never deceived herself about her faults; she never told herself she was in the right, and everybody else in the wrong; she could admire

beauty of character in others, but would end all such admiration by a toss of her head, accompanied by the thought :

“It wouldn’t suit me to be like that ; I should lose my fun, and, as I find it convenient to be what I am, I shall remain so—cold, selfish, heartless, as I know people call me ; but witty, beautiful, and amusing, as I know they find me.”

Such was the girl about whom Herbert Mounteagle was infatuated, of whose faults, loving her as he did, he was still not wholly ignorant ; this was the woman he desired, above all things, to possess as his wife, regardless of the fact that a character such as hers must be the source of infinite misery to anyone who should succeed in winning her, so long as he should continue to love her, and thus give her the power of tormenting him. Of all this he did not think ; she was beautiful and bewitching, this was what his eyes told him—that he loved her, his heart had warned him long ago—that he must and would win her, his will determined the first evening that he saw her again at Merriton.



